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MAGAZINE

BLACK MURDER

by
Roger Torrey

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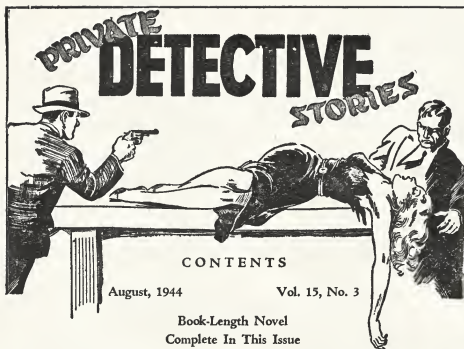
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The names and descriptions of all characters appearing in this magazine are entirely fictitious. If there is any resemblance, either in name or description, to any living person, it is purely a coincidence.

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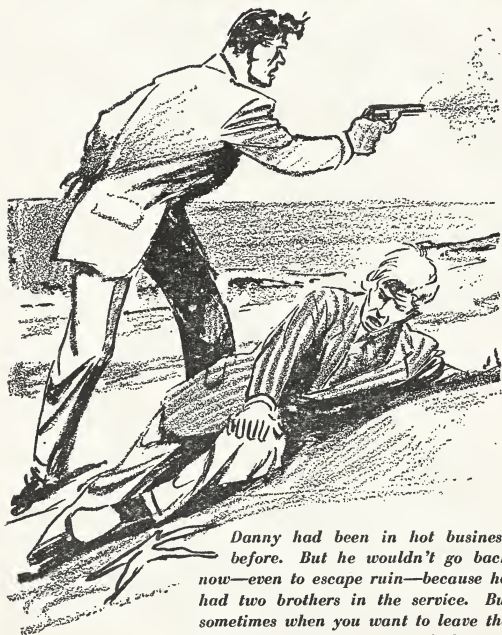
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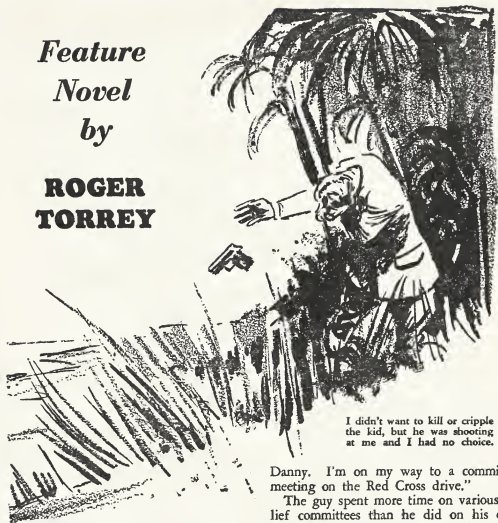
BLACK MURDER



Danny had been in hot business before. But he wouldn't go back now—even to escape ruin—because he had two brothers in the service. But sometimes when you want to leave the black market alone, it won't let you alone

*Feature
Novel
by*

**ROGER
TORREY**



I didn't want to kill or cripple the kid, but he was shooting at me and I had no choice.

Danny. I'm on my way to a committee meeting on the Red Cross drive."

The guy spent more time on various relief committees than he did on his own business. He was some sort of broker, wheat I think. Anyway he had a seat on the exchange and I'd heard him and a couple of his pals talk about May wheat, whatever that means.

It was one of the reasons I'd always liked him—that giving his time to charity, when his time must have been so valuable to himself.

I gave him his usual Scotch and plain water chaser and rang his half dollar up in the register. I thought it would probably be the last half buck of his I'd ever see, and that made me feel even worse.

Not because I needed his money—I'd put a little away—but just because I'd always liked the guy so much.

He must have read my mind. He said: "What's this about closing the place,



T WAS tough to have to close, but I just couldn't keep in stock. I'd built up the business on good whiskey and the rest of the hard liquor, and the stuff wasn't for sale any more. I

could get plenty of beer, all right, but there's no profit in that—and the allotment the whiskey dealers allowed me just would not carry my trade.

My lease was up and I wasn't renewing, and I was feeling pretty bad about the whole thing.

It was like that when Amos Larkin came in. Just like he did on the average of twice day and like he had for years.

He said: "Just time for a quick one,

Danny? I heard it but didn't believe it."

"I've kept open as long as I can, Mr. Larkin. I just can't get the stock. The dealers give me what they can, but they've rationed us, you know. They're playing fair, all right, but I just can't get along on what they allow me. Of course there's the Black Market—I've had a few bids on that—but I don't want any part of it."

"Rather close up, eh?"

"I would. I damn' well would."

He made another motion and got another drink. I got another half buck.

He said: "Let me see, Danny. I've heard—I think you told me yourself—that you used to run a little rum."

"That's close. Whiskey from Canada, mostly. I made a few trips out to the boats, but not many. It was safe enough, as long as you took care of the pay-off."

"And you kept a book, I heard."

"Just when I opened up. Before business was good. It helped, but now and then I'd get overloaded on some nag and lose all I'd made the month before. That's no part-time business—you can't follow it close enough if you're doing something else."

"I see."

I laughed and said: "I even handled some hot fur. Three or four times, I guess, in all. But I quit that because if I'd ever been caught, I'd have lost my license. I've thought a lot of this little bar, Mr. Larkin."

"I know you have, Danny. That's why I don't understand why you feel that way about the Black Market. If they've got liquor to sell, somebody's going to buy it. Why shouldn't it be you?"

He'd been coming in there three years and more and I suppose I'd talked to him as much or more than any other customer. And I liked him besides. But I told him something then he'd never heard.

I said: "Did you know I had two brothers?"

"I didn't, Danny. I don't believe I ever saw them, even."

"If you did, Mr. Larkin, it wasn't in here. They've never been in the place. It's like this. Ma was strict—she never liked the saloon business. In fact, she hated it. She brought the kids up the same way. I don't say they don't take a drink or anything like that, but they don't think it's a respectable

business or that I should be in it. Ma didn't, and because she felt like that, I backed her up with the kids. They're younger, you see. One was working in a bank, up-state, and the other was in his last year in college."

"Working his way through, Danny?"

"I was maybe helping a bit. Well, anyway, John, that's the one that was in the bank, is a second-looey in the Infantry, and the kid, his name's Michael, is a Navy flier. And the kid's already a full lieutenant. He's in the South Pacific and he's got twelve planes to his credit already."

"Why, that's great, Danny. Why didn't you tell me this before?"

"I guess because I didn't want anybody to know they were connected with anybody in this business. Anyway, that's why I don't do business with the Black Market, damn 'em all. You can see that now, can't you, Mr. Larkin?"

IF HE saw my side of it he didn't show it. And I don't blame him. All he knew about me was a bad record. Boot-legging, rum running, book making, and now I'd even told him how I'd handled stolen furs. I didn't blame him for not believing me.

He took a third drink, something he very seldom did.

And then he asked: "You'd know something about a gun, wouldn't you, Danny?"

I didn't know what he was getting at and said so. I said: "I've got one and I've shot it quite a lot, but I was never a hand at using it. That is, in business, if you know what I mean. I was never one of the boys who figured to shoot their way out of a jam. I always figured that if I got caught up with, why I'd taken the risk and I'd taken the profits and it just was my turn to pay up."

"I didn't mean quite that. You'd be handy with it, that's what I meant."

"Oh, sure. I still practice some."

"You're closing tomorrow?"

"This is the last day."

"Then how would you like to go to Florida with us?"

I didn't think I was hearing right and he grinned at me and repeated it. He said: "That's right. How would you like to go along with us? You'd be a good man to take care of Sonny, I think. For one thing,

he's too wild a kid to trot around the hot spots down there alone. He gets in too much trouble. There's too much liquor, too many women, and too much gambling down there for Sonny to take by himself. You could teach him boxing—the boy could be in far better condition than he is."

I said automatically: "I didn't box. It was wrestling."

"All the better. A better body-builder, I believe. And frankly, Danny, I'm worried about the boy. I'm afraid he's in trouble right now—trouble that might follow him down there."

"What's that, Mr. Larkin?"

"Do you know a boy about Sonny's age named Frank Alderdyce?"

"Barely," I said. "He's been in the bar a couple of times. I think with Sonny, if it comes to that."

"Well, Frank's down in the morgue. I have to make arrangements about that, after this meeting. I promised his father—you know Alderdyce and I are old friends—that I'd look after it for him. He's in Chicago, and the boy can't be left in a public morgue. I'll arrange to have him taken to a decent funeral parlor and held there until his father can get back here."

"What happened to him?"

Larkin shrugged then. He said: "He was found down by the river in an alley. Shot five times in the belly. Gangster stuff, the police think."

"It could well be," I said. "It sounds like a hired killer who wanted to make sure he'd earned his money."

"Exactly. And he and Sonny ran around quite a bit together and Sonny, I'm afraid, owes as many gambling debts as did young Alderdyce. So you can see why a guard would be a good thing for Sonny to have."

I said I could understand it.

"Would you like to go down with me after the meeting?"

I certainly didn't want to go to the morgue with anybody, but it looked like I was going to work for him and I couldn't very well say no.

So I said yes and Larkin took another drink and left the place. I thought that having to take a dead kid out of the morgue, a boy he knew and a friend of his son's, accounted for the four drinks at one time.

Because he'd never taken over three at one sitting like that since he'd been coming in the place, and that was for three years and more.

He didn't drink as much as I did, and I'm no lush if I say it myself.

IT WAS five o'clock when he came back for me and my bar man was working and I was set and ready. And I got a notion then of why he wanted me to go with him, something that had been puzzling me. He had Sonny with him as well as a man named Milton Sawyer, who I gathered was Larkin's lawyer. Also I met the chauffeur, a bird named Lew Sands, and a guy I didn't like the second I saw him.

Sonny had been in my place probably half a dozen times and I liked the kid all right. Sawyer I'd never met, but he seemed okay, too. A big, chunky guy that looked the way lawyers do in moving pictures and hardly ever do when you see 'em in court. Sands was a smooth, hard-looking bird, but I will say he drove Larkin's big car in a beautiful way—cutting around and taking more than his share of traffic, but getting away with it in great shape. I put him at around thirty, and I knew he'd been around plenty just by looking at him.

Sonny was just a brat, even if he did tip the scales at around a hundred and ninety, any weight. He was twenty-two, I knew that—and he'd been kicked out of every school he'd ever attended. Blonde and good looking if you like 'em a little pouty.

When I saw Sawyer and Sonny along with the old man, I knew why I'd been asked along. Larkin wanted to see how Sonny and I would get along, and he'd probably brought Sawyer along to confirm any idea he got. He didn't say that, though.

He said: "I brought Mr. Sawyer along just in case there's any trouble in getting custody of the body. A lawyer, in a case like this, can do more than a plain business man can ever do."

Sawyer said that Mr. Larkin flattered him—that a man of Mr. Larkin's prominence could do just about as he pleased.

Sonny said nothing, just looked longingly at every bar we passed.

Another thing I liked was that I rode in

back with them instead of up in front with Lew Sands. I'd been afraid I'd be treated too much as a servant, something I was damned sure I wouldn't go for very long.

We got down to the morgue and it seemed we were expected. Anyway, two cops, one of them a captain, were waiting for us, as well as the regular morgue crew.

Larkin said briskly: "Well, Captain Hayes! I'm glad you could meet us here. Of course you know what I'm after. Here's my authority from Mr. Alderdyce—he wired me as soon as he'd heard what happened."

The captain looked at the wire Larkin showed him but as though he didn't care what was in it. I could see that the captain had already made up his mind to do anything Larkin asked him to do.

And I thought what a swell thing it would be to have the dough the guy had and the standing the money gave him. My few bucks didn't look very big right then.

Then we went inside to the cold room, or whatever they call it, to look at young Alderdyce.

THE place wasn't nice, though it was as clean as it could be. It smelled of formaldehyde mostly, but there was something more than that. It must have been death. There were no bodies in sight and when Larkin asked about that, the morgue attendant told him they kept the newcomers in another room. Here, all there was was sort of sliding shelves in the walls, all numbered, and with doors that fitted tightly.

It was the first time I'd ever been there and I hoped the last.

The attendant took the handle of number seventeen and pulled, and the shelf slipped off as though it was on ball bearings. The boy was covered with a canvas sheet and he pulled that down to show us, and when he did, I wished I was outside in the air.

The kid had been cut open and sewed up again in a neat little cross stitch. But there were five neat holes in the poor guy's belly, all along the stitching that ran there.

Any one of them would have killed him and the attendant told us more. When the doctors did their post mortem they found the kid had a heart that was no good at all.

Sonny, who was looking a little sick, said: "I knew that. That was why he was 4-F.

Mine is a bad ear. That's one reason I always liked him—because the Army didn't like either one of us."

I'd been remembering something and I spit it out. I said: "Listen! Maybe I got something, captain. This kid, if I'm right, was putting on a personal fight with the Black Market. I remember something about it in the papers, I think. He said that if he couldn't fight in the Army, why he'd fight on the home front, or something like that."

The captain said: "We remembered it too, Mr.—what did you say your name was?"

"Dan Morahan."

"Run a bar, don't you?"

"This is my last day."

Larkin laughed and said: "Danny here, captain, is hipped on this Black Market stuff. If you take my advice, you'll check young Alderdyce's gambling. I understand the boy owed quite a lot of money around town. It may be—it's my idea anyway, that he didn't pay one of them promptly enough."

"We're checking that angle too, Mr. Larkin," said the captain, woodenly.

I happened to look at Sonny and I saw him give his father a worried look. I decided that papa and Sonny had had words on the matter of gambling debts and many of them.

Sawyer said smoothly: "We'll have someone come down for the poor lad then, captain. I surely hope your investigation won't lapse, because of our having the body taken to, let us say, a more attractive surroundings."

"It won't," said the captain. "We don't slow up much on murder cases in this town. We don't drop them, sir."

We went away then, with Sawyer and Larkin giving each other satisfied looks. Sonny and I had a few words about what was running at the Florida tracks, Sonny knowing I'd made book at one time and asking advice, and I saw Larkin and Sawyer look satisfied at that, too.

I figured they wanted to see how Sonny and I would get along, and I'd show them. They dropped me at the bar and the last thing Larkin said was to the point.

"When you get straightened out on the closing, Danny," he said, "come up to the

office and see me. If I shouldn't be in, my secretary usually knows where I am or when I'll be back. We'll be leaving for the South in four days, I think, so plan on it."

I told him I had what would be left of my stock all disposed of and would be ready to go the next day, if necessary.

And that was that. I spent the evening in my own bar, getting a little bit tight while saying goodbye to my best customers.

CHAPTER II

The Set-up



GOT a bang when I met Larkin at the station. I knew he had money and lots of it, but I also had heard of how hard it was to get rail reservations. And how anybody with priority could take it away from you if they needed it.

All he had was a drawing room for himself and his wife. It was the first time I'd seen her. She was about forty-five and she weighed close to two-fifty if I'm any judge. She was screwy as a toad, too. She looked at me as if I'd crawled out from under some rug, and told her husband what she thought of me as if I was a mile away instead of three feet.

"Why, Amos," she said. "This man will be impossible. I can't allow Sonny to be seen with him. Why he's a type, my dear."

Larkin winked at me and I let it go. The wink said she was nuts as plain as if he'd spoken out loud.

Sonny and I had a compartment together. And very nice—they are when you're riding an extra fare train.

Then I met the sister. Dinah. Sonny told me she was eighteen but she looked about twenty-five. One of the kind of kids that have their noses up in the air as if she was smelling something bad. But pretty!—oh my. She had a compartment to herself, as did Milton Sawyer, who it seemed was also traveling with us.

I was surprised at this but Sonny took it for granted. He said: "Dad always takes Milt along with him, wherever he goes. Dad's the only client Milt's got and the only one he needs. Dad's paying him better than a hundred grand a year and expenses, and that ain't hay."

Sonny gave me some more news, just as soon as we were settled in the compartment and he'd broken out a bottle of whiskey, which it seemed was about all the baggage he carried. He told me that Sands was taking the big car down, along with a Mrs. Watson, the housekeeper, and Mrs. Larkin's maid, who was named Mary O'Day. I asked him about gas rationing and he said it didn't bother the old man at all, and just laughed when I asked how he got around it.

I could see Sonny didn't give me credit for being more than a half-wit, which was okay with me. I was giving him the same rating, you see.

That's the way the trip started and it went that way for the time it took to make the trip. Everybody ate in their own rooms—the Larkins, you could see, weren't the kind of people who'd eat in the diner with the common herd, nor would their guests.

It was nice but I felt guilty about it. I also felt guilty about the way young Sonny lapped up the hooch on the trip, but when I told his father that, he just laughed and said to never mind it—that Sonny always drank himself sick while riding on a train.

THEIR place was between Palm Beach and Miami and when we got off the train, there was a station wagon, complete with chauffeur, to meet us, if you please. This chauffeur, a colored man named Charles. And the station wagon wasn't a rickety old one, like most of those you see these days but a brand new one built on a Buick chassis.

This dazed me, too, but Sonny just laughed at the way I took it, so I kept my mouth shut.

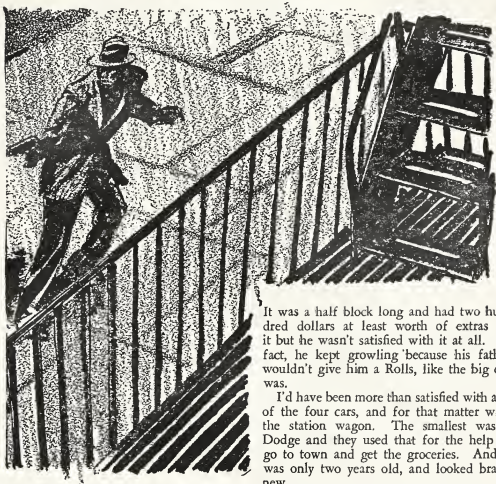
The train was a bit away from the ocean, and we had to drive maybe four miles to reach their place. And then I really bugged my eyes.

It was beautiful. There was a little point of land running out and the house was on the very tip of it. Ocean on three sides and pines and palms behind. The road in was private, Larkin's alone, and it was like a graveled drive leading up to a house in town. There were four cars in the garage besides the station wagon, and there was room for as many more.

Sonny said: "I'll be damned if I know



It was the old gangster stuff. They found him shot to death in an alley. . . .



It was a half block long and had two hundred dollars at least worth of extras on it but he wasn't satisfied with it at all. In fact, he kept growling 'because his father wouldn't give him a Rolls, like the big car was.

I'd have been more than satisfied with any of the four cars, and for that matter with the station wagon. The smallest was a Dodge and they used that for the help to go to town and get the groceries. And it was only two years old, and looked brand new.

why dad wanted the big car down here but I suppose it was because he wanted Lew. He depends a lot on Lew. And then Mrs. Watson and Mary O'Day had to come down, too, and it was as easy for them to drive down with Lew as it would have been to ride down the train. For that matter, I'd have rather driven down. Of course not with Mrs. Watson."

"Why not with Mrs. Watson?"

Sonny laughed at that again. "Dad's a jealous ———," he said. "Or do I have to draw you a picture?"

I hadn't seen this Mrs. Watson yet but I'd seen Mrs. Larkin and I could gather what was meant. All this was while we were still in the garage and while the others had gone over to the house. We stayed because Sonny wanted to see what care they'd been taking of his convertible, which was a special job.

Then we went to the house, passing two houses which were built the same way as the big one, very Spanish and each with a patio. These were the servants' quarters, and the average citizen would be glad to have one of them for the rest of his life to live in. They looked to be about eight rooms, coming out in that U-shape like that.

And then we came to the big house and I really had something to stare at. The patio was sixty feet wide and the same deep, Sonny told me that. It had a fountain in the middle full of fish, big goldfish of all shapes and sizes. It was planted with every tropical thing they can grow in that country, and if there's anything that don't grow in Florida that Chamber of Commerce has never heard of it.

The house, coming out around the patio in that U-shape, was two stories high on

the sides and three in the back. There was a balcony running around the second floor and this was screened—I could see the sun glint on the brass screens but that was all. Sonny explained it beautifully.

He said: "If the wind's from the sea, there's no mosquitoes or anything. But from the other way, from the beach, the house protects against the wind and the bugs get bad. So then we sit on the balcony instead of in the patio to do our drinking."

WE MET his father just inside and Sonny gave him a blast about the car. He claimed they hadn't taken proper care of it, but the old man just grinned and paid no attention to him.

Instead, he said to me: "Come along, Danny, I'll show you where you're to stay."

He left Sonny standing there talking to himself and I followed him into the back part of the house and through that to a hall that led down through the right wing. Rooms on each side, those on the right facing the ocean and those on the left facing the patio. I forgot to say that all the windows were full width of the rooms, as near as I'd seen—and I found out afterward I was right.

I didn't have a room—I had a large living room, bedroom and bath.

The old man said: "I wanted to get you in here and settled before Mrs. Larkin fills the house with the people she'll pick up. She's got a gift—she can find more people I dislike than you'd think possible—and she'll give them the best rooms in the house. This will do you, I think."

I said, and told the truth: "I never lived in such a nice place in my life."

"I want you satisfied, Danny. Maybe by and by I'll have a better job for you than just looking after Sonny. I want you satisfied with the way you're treated."

I said I was more than satisfied.

"I suppose you're wondering how and why I do this in war time?"

"I didn't think it was possible, that's all, Mr. Larkin."

"There's two reasons for it, Danny. First, there's Mrs. Larkin. While she looks healthy, she has a bad heart condition that means she has to live as she's been accustomed to live. Her doctors have testified to

that, she has several, so there's no doubt about it."

Mrs. Larkin looked as healthy as a horse to me but I gave him the benefit of the doubt. That is, I didn't say what I thought.

He went on with: "And then I have to consider my position, though I don't want to seem to brag. The ration board has also taken that into consideration. While a good part, the main part for that matter, of the entertaining we do down here is done by Mrs. Larkin, I occasionally have business consultations with people from the North who visit us. Some of these are of vital importance and I have to put myself in as good a light in these as I can to be successful in them. I'm sure you understand, Danny."

"Sure, Mr. Larkin."

"How old are you, Danny?"

"Forty-one."

"Oh, I see. You look much younger—I was wondering, to be frank, why you hadn't joined the Army, feeling as you do."

I said: "It was that damned wrestling I did when I was a kid. It gives you what they call athletic heart, and I got turned down by 'em all."

"It don't seem to bother you any."

He hit my pet gripe and I told him about it. There was nothing wrong with me that should interfere with Army duty that I could see and I said so. I could still do anything that anybody ten years younger could do, or so I thought. I said that, too. Altogether, I guess I made quite a speech.

HE SAID: "You don't drink much, Danny?"

"Some. Once in a while. Not much."

"You know, Danny, I've got no objection to it. For that matter, you'll probably get along better with Sonny if you drink a bit."

I must have looked funny about that because he laughed and said: "You're wondering why I don't shut down on the boy, eh?"

"Well, to be honest, I have."

"It just upsets Mrs. Larkin when I do and I have to bear in mind that heart condition of hers. She gets upset and she has an attack. I can't have that, of course. I just want you to go along with Sonny and keep him out of trouble. Of course if you

can get him in better shape, get him to cut down on his drinking, why, that would be fine. But we can't make any issue of it because of Mrs. Larkin's heart condition, now can we?"

I said I could see where we couldn't do that. And then he told me that no doubt I'd want to clean up a bit after the trip and that he'd leave me.

And right at the door he stopped and turned and told me something else that I didn't like at all.

He said: "And oh yes, Danny. I want you to go down with Sonny tomorrow, to the city, and get some clothes. Sonny will know—he's got some shopping to do himself. You understand, I'm sure—I can't expect you to furnish clothes for a climate like this, coming right from the city and all. It wouldn't be fair to you to spend your money."

It made me sore—I'd been buying my own clothes since I was fourteen and was able to buy 'em out of the salary he was paying me, too. He was giving me a hundred bucks a week, which was more than my bar had ever made.

But I could see his side of it at that—he wanted me dressed so I wouldn't shame him in front of his guests and those his wife would have there.

So I didn't object too much—I told him I could well afford to get what I'd need and he laughed and told me to put my money in the bank or buy war bonds with it.

So I let it go—there was nothing I could gain by being stubborn, and that war bond argument was a big one.

He left me then—and I figured he'd left me in clover. I was in a soft spot for a guy who didn't have any schooling to speak of and who'd led the sort of life I had. Take a roughneck like me, whose only ambition up to then had been to run a decent little bar, and put him in a place like that, making that kind of money and being treated like a king, and it's easy to see how I felt.

I thought I was really on top of the world. And I kept that thought for all of four days and by that time things were in full swing and I thought I was in a madhouse.

CHAPTER III

The Madhouse



MRS. LARKIN had found a Countess and her son, or that's what they claimed to be. Refugees, they said they were and I believed that part of it, but my idea of it

was that they were refugees from a chain gang. If I ever saw two crooks, two hustlers, it was those two, and I'd seen enough to be a judge.

They were high class, that's all I could give them. The woman was about forty-five, about Mrs. Larkin's age, and the kid was about Sonny's age. I didn't think they were even mother and son, but just working an angle that made that a good story.

The Countess was too flashy—Mrs. Larkin said that was the way Countesses all were and the kid was too slick and greasy. Mrs. Larkin said that was Continental. He had long sideburns and put stuff on his hair and used perfume, but he was no sissy. He was nuts about the girls and no mistake. Any and all of them.

They were staying for all time, as near as I could see—they had one of those lasting invitations.

Mrs. Larkin had other people, too, but they were just there for week-ends and for days and overnight, and they seemed all right. Most of them were screwballs, but Larkin had told me to expect that.

That was bad enough but the family set-up was something to turn a man's stomach.

Lew Sands had come in with the big car and with Mrs. Watson and the O'Day girl, and there was hell to pay from the time they drove into the yard.

Sonny hadn't been fooling when he'd hinted that his father had ideas about Mrs. Watson. The woman was built like Mae West and she didn't have the manners of an alley cat. I'm hard-boiled, or thought I was, and it got even me. She and Larkin were so careless about what people thought—that's what made me sore. If Mrs. Larkin hadn't been deaf, dumb and blind, she'd have had to know what was going on, but she didn't seem to see a thing.

That was only part of it. Mrs. Larkin was trying to fix things between the Count

—I guess that was what he was—they all called him that, anyway, and her daughter Dinah. And the Count was for it, too—he took one look around and he wanted to move right in. He'd have been interested in the kid if she was cross-eyed and half nuts, but she was a good-looking kid and that would have taken the curse off marrying into money for him.

But Dinah, the little fool, couldn't see anybody but the chauffeur, this Lew Sands. She was nuts about him, and the more I saw of him the less I could see why. He was as crooked as the Count and a damned sight tougher.

The maid, Mary O'Day, was as cute as a bug's ear and Sonny thought the same. Every time he found her alone he passed at her, and she couldn't see him for dust.

She was the only decent one in the place, except little Dinah, and Dinah was such a little fool I didn't count her as more than half human.

I WAS getting along all right with her, though. She only acted snooty because her mama did and she thought it was the thing to do. When you knew her she was just a damn' fool kid with damn' fool kid notions.

She was the kind I'd have sent home from my bar in a cab—and the O'Day girl was the kind I wouldn't have let in unless she came with her brother or her old man.

There were a dozen more servants but they were all colored. Sands had a little room at the back of the house and Mrs. Watson had the same set-up I had but in the other wing of the house. That was closer to Larkin's suite, which probably explained it. The little O'Day girl had a room, a small one, in the same wing I had, and I was glad of it.

I was afraid that sometime Sonny would get too much of a snoutful and try to break in on her, and that was the only reason.

It was like that when the fireworks began to happen.

They started when Larkin got company from the North. Two big fat men, brothers by the name of Morrison. Larkin and Milton Sawyer, who'd been a swell guy to me right along, and these brothers had a big meeting in the library, not even coming out

for dinner. They had ale and sandwiches sent in to them instead, and I could hear them arguing in there at the tops of their voices when I had to go past the room.

It apparently ended peacefully enough because when they left, late the next day, they all seemed good friends. They just stayed overnight.

THAT next evening, right after they left, Sonny decided he wanted to go to town and make whoopee, and of course I had to tag along. I give the kid credit at that—outside of that first day when we went to town and got clothes, he hadn't broken loose once. He'd drunk steadily and far too much but he'd done it at home where he belonged.

But he wanted to go out that night and away we went in that damned convertible of his.

In the first place, he didn't recognize any speed limits. He was a good driver, all right, but I don't feel safe with anybody that thinks eighty miles an hour is loafing along the road.

I was a wreck before we even got to town, and watching Sonny going into action didn't ease my pain.

The first place we went into had a fiddle and piano, both of which sounded good to me, although they were playing what Sonny said were Strauss waltzes. I don't know a thing about music—just what I like—but this was all right with me. It fitted the place, which was sort of dim, and furnished the way a high-class cocktail bar should be.

But Sonny said: "That's corn, right off the cob," and went over with a twenty-dollar bill in his hand to the musicians.

I saw them nod and smile and right away they started in trying to play swing—and a fiddle and piano can't play that sort of stuff. At least not the way it should be played. Even if I don't know music, I could tell it sounded like hell.

However, Sonny grunted and said: "That's some better," and started ordering drinks.

Not just for himself and me but for everybody in the place.

He started by giving the two bar men a ten-spot apiece and half that to each waiter. And the drinks started whirling around, with the guests looking bewildered when

they'd be served a drink they hadn't ordered. They'd ask the bar men and the bar men would point at Sonny and the guest would bow and Sonny would hold both hands above his head, and shake 'em, like a prize fighter does when he goes in the ring.

I've got no manners, other than what I've picked up in the bar by watching people who have, but even I felt like a fool.

And then the way he drank. Martinis, which is a nice drink but nothing to take down like so much water. One after the other and instead of sipping them, drinking them down like they were straight whiskey.

It was embarrassing.

We stayed in that place for almost an hour and how he managed it I don't know but he wasn't very drunk when we left for another. I took it slow—made two ryes and sodas last me the full time.

The next place had just a piano and the guy was playing what Sonny seemed to like. Popular stuff, and slow and soft. Sonny liked it enough, anyway, to pass over another twenty.

He did the same with the bar man—there was only one in this place, and he gave both waiters five-spots. And then started buying for the house.

NOW this isn't good, unless you're in a place where you know just about everybody. Like the crowd that used to hang around my little place. I had the same trade day after day, night after night, and if somebody won, say in a crap game, or really beat the bookies bad that day, why he could buy a round or two and nobody thought anything about it. But when you go into a barroom full of perfect strangers and insist on paying for every drink, why that's something else again. A guy taking his girl out, for instance, resents it. He took the wench out with the idea of spending a little dough on her and showing her a good time, and it makes him sore to have a Coal Oil Johnny come in and flash twenties where he's been flashing ones. And it's even worse with the older men. They're like me—used to buying and paying for what they get, and they don't like to have a young cub force free drinks down their throats.

I could see where Mr. Larkin thought

Sonny should have somebody along to look after him in case of trouble. I could see where trouble was a cinch if Sonny was on the prowl.

It happened in the third bar—or cocktail bar, as they call 'em down there. Sonny was getting pretty high by then and it was God's own wonder he was able to stand on his own two feet with the amount of liquor he'd had. This bar was like the first, except the music was an accordion, a long-necked banjo, the first one I'd seen in years, and a guitar. Sonny paid 'em off right at the start, as usual, paid off the bar men, there were two, and fixed up the waiters.

And then started his drink-buying.

There was a young officer with a bunch of ribbons on his chest, sitting right next to us with his lady. He wore captain's bars, though he couldn't have been over twenty-five or six, and his ribbons showed plenty of active service. He had wings above 'em, and I wanted to ask him if he'd ever happened to have met Michael, who was in the South Pacific, too. I could tell by the ribbons that this boy had seen service there and lots of times the Army fliers and the Navy fliers are together on some mission.

His girl was about twenty and seemed like a nice kid. She was sipping a highball, but the captain was just playing with a glass of beer.

Sonny waved an arm and the waiter came over. Sonny waved an arm around the room and said: "I'll buy a drink for the house." And then he happened to look over at the captain's table, and made his mistake.

He said: "And don't bring the officer any of that belly wash. Buy him a man's drink."

The captain stood up and came over and put both hands on our table. He leaned down and spoke to Sonny and he still managed to speak pleasantly.

He said: "I'm sorry, mister, but I'm flying early in the morning. That is, if I don't do any drinking tonight. So I'm sure you'll excuse me."

Now he spoke quietly and all that, but he was sore as a goat. It showed in the flush in his cheeks, the very quietness of his voice, and in the way he had his hands made into fists, where they rested on our table.

Sonny paid this no attention. He said:

"Oh, what the hell! Why drink beer when you can drink a man's drink."

I knew the captain didn't want to be mixed up in any barroom brawl, but I could see he had as much as he could stand.

I said: "He's drunk, captain. I'm sorry. I'll try and tone him down."

"Please do," said the captain, and started back to his table. It gave him a decent out and he was glad to take advantage of it—which was why I spoke. I didn't have any hopes at all of toning him down and both the captain and I knew it.

THEN a big man whom I hadn't noticed was with us. He spoke to me but looked at Sonny and he looked at Sonny in definitely an ugly way.

"What's the trouble?" he asked.

Sonny said: "What the hell's it to you?"

"Out," the guy said, and picked Sonny up by one shoulder. He used one hand and didn't seem to have any difficulty lifting him, though Sonny was up around a hundred and ninety.

I said: "You the owner?"

He said: "What the hell's it to you?" mimicking Sonny, of course.

If he'd given me a polite answer—I spoke to him that way—I'd have had to sit there and watch him pitch Sonny into the street. There'd have been nothing else I could have done—Sonny had earned it in a big way. I could fight for the kid if he had half a leg to stand on, but I couldn't take up for him when he was so far in the wrong—not and look at myself in the mirror when I shaved.

But this made it different. It put it more on a personal basis.

I stood up and said: "Take your hands off the boy."

"And if I don't?" he asked.

I moved then. I went in fast and under the arm that was holding Sonny up, and I put my left hand clear up to the wrist in his belly as I did. He didn't expect it—he expected an argument, and he didn't have his belly muscles tightened the way they should have been. He let out a grunt that sounded all over the room and bent over, with both hands around his middle, and I got Sonny by the elbow and started toward the door with him. He tried to twist away

and I put my fingers right into the joint, where it bends, and caught the nerve there.

He went then like a little lamb, with his face all screwed up from the pain of it. And outside I told him the score.

I said: "You chump! If we'd stayed there, we'd have been mobbed. What the hell's the idea insulting that officer?"

I'd let go his arm by then and he stood rubbing it and looking bewildered. He said: "Why, I just asked the guy to have a drink, is all."

I let it go. There's nothing you can say to a drunk that means anything, anyway.

We left after the next spot. All of a sudden his liquor really took hold of him and he started to put his head down on the table and go to sleep. I paid the check out of his money—he had his billfold out on the table and it was still crammed with dough, and got him outside and started him up the street toward where we'd parked the car. And ran into a cop before I'd gone ten feet.

I had the kid half draped on me and was rushing him along, so that I wouldn't have to pick him up and carry him. Once I let him stop I knew he'd sag and go clear out. The cop stepped in front of us and there was nothing I could do but stop—and hold Sonny up.

The cop said: "Trouble?" in a bright and interested way.

I said: "My friend just had one or two too many. I'll take care of him, officer."

"Tourists, eh?"

"This is Sonny Larkin—his father's got a place up the beach."

"And you?"

"I'm staying with them."

He said: "Lemme give you a hand, friend," and got his shoulder under Sonny's other shoulder, and we went up the street that way. And when we got to the car he helped me put Sonny in it and told me how the cops did there.

"We try to give the outside people a break here, friend. Understand, you can't fight on the street but if a man's just a little drunk, we'll try and see he gets to where he's staying. You all right to drive the car?"

"I coasted. I came along to look after the kid."

He waved me good luck and sauntered away and I searched Sonny for the car keys and slid under the wheel.

And we didn't drive back at any eighty miles an hour, either.

CHAPTER IV

Hell to Pay



HERE was hell to pay at the house. The driveway was full of State Police and sheriff's cars, and the house was alive with the men that brought them there. I had Sonny propped up, just out of the car, when a big State man came bouncing out at me from the dark. He wore corporal's stripes and he must have weighed at least two hundred and thirty pounds.

He said: "And who's this?"

"Sonny Larkin," I said.

"And you?"

"My name's Morahan."

"You live here too?"

"Sure. What's happened?"

"The kid drunk?"

"Drunker than a fool."

"Where you two been?"

"In town. Where he got that way."

"How long?"

"Three hours, maybe a little longer."

"Prove it, can you?"

"Hell, yes."

"I'll help you inside with him."

"What's happened?"

"Larkin's dead."

"How?"

"You'll see it, mister. Here, let me have him."

He picked the kid up in a fireman's carry like he was a child, and we went in the house that way. The big guy didn't even grunt when he picked him up, and he walked along with him like he didn't weigh a thing.

And the first thing I saw was Larkin, in the main hall, and on the floor in a mess of blood.

THERE were a bunch of cops there, too, but none of the other people in the house except Milton Sawyer. The cop that had Sonny carried him up to another one,

this one wearing sergeant's stripes, and put him off his shoulder and held him on his feet.

"This here's the son, sarge," he said. "He just got in. This guy here, says his name is Morahan, just brought him home."

The sergeant took one look at Sonny and turned his head and bawled out: "Hey, doc!"

That brought a thin, dignified looking bird that wore a clipped mustache that was as grey as his hair. At that I didn't think he was more than fifty, fifty-five at the most. He came from the left wing, and he had his coat off and his sleeves rolled up.

He still managed to look dignified, though.

The sergeant said: "Take a look at just what came in. Think you can bring him around so he can talk sense?"

The doctor looked at Sonny and then doubtful.

I said: "He's had a hell of a lot to drink but all of it in the last three hours. Maybe a stomach pump would clear part of it out."

The doctor swore and said: "Another one!"

I found out later that he'd been working on the Countess at the time the sergeant called him. And with a stomach pump—she'd decided that was her night to howl and they were trying to bring her to life to see if she could tell them anything.

The doctor said: "Where's his room?"

I said: "If the corporal will carry him, I'll show the way."

He did it easy and I made heavy weather of it. I was just using my head. He picked the kid up on his shoulder and I led the way and we took him in his bedroom and dumped him on the bed.

The doctor followed and said, fretfully: "Put him in the bathroom, men. I've got to work on him. Oh, damn me! Why did I ever learn medicine?"

We left them together and went back to the hall, with the corporal telling me: "He's a sort of society doctor and most of his cases are bringing people out of hangovers and using stomach pumps on 'em and things like that. I don't blame the poor ——— much, but look at the dough he makes."

I said I guessed he earned it.

Then he looked at me and said: "Hey! You said you was staying here with these people?"

"Sure. I am."

"How come?"

"What d'ya mean?"

"Don't kid me, bud. You're not like these folks. You're a roughneck and nothing else. No offense meant, of course."

I said: "I'm staying here but I'm working here, too. I'm supposed to be looking after the kid. He gets in trouble with liquor, women, and gambling, and I'm supposed to see he don't get in too much of it."

"I get it."

"I've got a private license, if you want to see it. Larkin got it for me. Not that it makes any difference here—the kid and I were in town and don't know a thing about this."

"You mean you're a private detective?"

"Yeah."

"You might be able to help at that."

"Nuts. I've only been a private detective four days and I don't know a damn' thing about it."

"Well, you know these people here, don't you?"

"Sure."

"You can help then, mister, believe me. I never seen such a crew in my born days."

WE WERE standing away from the bunch that was still around the body. Sawyer saw me and came over and joined us.

"A terrible thing, Danny," he said.

"I still don't know what happened."

"Amos was in the library the last anybody saw him. That is except the one who killed him, I guess. Then there was a shot and we all rushed out and there he was, just like you see him now."

"Where was everybody?"

Sawyer looked troubled. "That's what's going to make it bad, I'm afraid. Everybody had separated, for a few minutes. The Countess had gone to her room to lie down. She'd—well, she'd taken a few too many, I'm afraid."

The State Police corporal laughed, and said: "So says the doc!"

"Well, the Count and Dinah—I'd better put that another way. Dinah got angry at the Count and said she was going for a

walk. The Count watched which way she went, I'm afraid, because in about five minutes he slipped out after her. He didn't find her—they both say that, but it leaves both of them alone; neither can support the other one's alibi."

"Hell, man! Dinah wouldn't kill her own father."

The corporal said: "You're right, mister, you're new in this business, all right. There's plenty of cases where a girl has killed her old man. There's a few of them doing life for it right now."

Even Milton Sawyer thought I'd made a funny crack. He didn't grin much but he said: "I thought everybody had heard about Lizzie Borden, Danny."

"I still don't think she did it."

"I don't either, of course, Danny, but in a case like this an alibi is a very good thing to have and poor little Dinah has none."

I said: "What about Mrs. Watson? Mrs. Larkin? For that matter, what about Lew Sands and the O'Day kid? For that matter, where were you, Mister Sawyer?"

"Don't get sore, fella," the corporal said.

"I don't like these cracks about Dinah, that's all."

SAWYER said: "I'll answer the last part of your question first. I have no more of an alibi than anybody else. I was in my own room. I went there for a cigar, but I also went in my bathroom. I barely heard the shot, as a matter of fact. You see there's a turn in the hall and I had three doors closed after me besides that. The door to my suite—the door leading from the sitting room into the bedroom—and the bathroom door. I just heard a sort of thud, to be honest, and I didn't even bother to come out of the suite until I heard the screaming."

"Who screamed?"

"Mrs. Watson. She must have heard it and dashed right out. It's a wonder she didn't see who did it."

Sawyer was on the right wing, where I was, and Mrs. Watson was on the left, the same as Larkin and Mrs. Larkin and Sonny.

"What did she do then?"

"When she saw him, she stood there and screamed for a minute. Then Sands came

running just in time to see her keel over in a faint. We brought her out of that, this was when we were all there, and she had hysterics. We got her quieted somewhat, but the doctor had to give her a hypo when he finally got here."

He tossed the kid over his shoulders and we went into the house that way to see the dead man.



"What time was this?"

"About nine."

I thought back and decided Sonny and I were in the second bar about then.

I asked: "And the rest? What about Mrs. Larkin? And Sands?"

"Sands was in his room. He said he'd been taking a nap—that he was still catching up on the sleep he lost on the trip coming down."

"Believe it?"

Sawyer shrugged. "I'm just telling you what he said. He's got no alibi—no more than the rest of us. Mrs. Larkin was in her room—she says she was changing her make-up."

"Why? At that hour?"

Sawyer shrugged again. "If you or any other man can figure what Mrs. Larkin does or why, I'd like to know how it's done. I've never been able to do it in the years I've known her."

I could understand that—I'd always thought the woman was the original screwball. He went on with: "The little O'Day girl was also in her room. For that matter, I saw her when I left my room, after the screaming I heard. She was coming out at the same time."

"Well, then, it's an alibi for both of you, isn't it?"

The corporal said gently: "Not so, Morahan. Either of them would have had time to have shot Larkin and then run back to their room. And then to have come out when Mrs. Watson found the body and screamed. Isn't that right, Mr. Sawyer? Not that I'm saying either of you did it, of course."

"That's right, corporal. There's not a soul in the house with an alibi, except you and Sonny. I presume you two were together all evening?"

"We were. I had a hell of a night."

"I'd like to hear about it sometime," he said, this time grinning. "Well, I'm glad to hear somebody's in the clear, anyway. This is going to be very bad."

THE corporal said: "Larkin had a pile of dough, didn't he?"

"He was a very wealthy man, corporal, yes. I've been his attorney for a number of years and am in a position to know,"

"Then it'll be hell," said the corporal, comfortably. "They try to work with those kind of people in this country. If it was some poor guy, it'd go on the back page of the newspaper and the cops would work two days and then forget about it."

"You're not a local man, corporal?"

"Lord, no. From Georgia."

He didn't pronounce it that way but that's what it meant. He said it something like, "Gawga."

"What was he shot with? Maybe there's a lead that way?"

"The bullet went all the way through but the doctor thinks a .45. At least a very heavy gun."

I said: "Oh hell!" and both the corporal and Sawyer looked at me. I explained: "I didn't take the thing along with me tonight. We were just going to do a little drinking. Sonny said, and I didn't want the nuisance. Maybe it was mine—it's a .45 Colt Auto."

"Let's go see."

The three of us went to my room then, with the others apparently not even noticing we were leaving. I'd left the gun in my top dresser drawer, and sure enough it was there, but when I started to reach for it, the big cop just grabbed my hand.

He said: "Hey! Wait! Maybe it's the one. D'ya want to spoil any prints there may be on it?"

He took a pencil from his pocket and stuck that in the gun barrel to lift it from the drawer. And he smelled the barrel and nodded.

He said: "It's a damn' good thing for you, Morahan, that you had an alibi. And I'll tell you now it's going to be thoroughly checked. This gun's been fired and just a little while ago."

WE ALL trooped out front again, with the cop holding the pistol up on his pencil like it was a lollypop on a stick. By that time they'd busted into groups in the hall, with the sergeant at the side, talking to the doctor, who now had his coat on.

The corporal said: "I've found the gun, sarge. Belongs to Morahan, here."

"I thought you were with young Larkin tonight," the sergeant said. "What's this? Where'd you get the gun and what right have you got to have it?"

The corporal said: "He's got a private license, sarge. And he says he's got an alibi with young Larkin and I'll believe it until we check it and find different. His room was open—anybody could have walked in and snaffled the gun and turned and walked out again."

He gave the sergeant a look that meant something—I hoped something in my favor. And it seemed to be that way because the sergeant quit acting like I was a suspect.

He said: "You might give the gun to Jolliffe, corporal, and have him check it for prints."

The corporal turned the gun over to a thin little guy with glasses, but who was wearing the State uniform just the same. The fingerprint expert. He handed it over by the pencil and the little guy took a tiny bellows. We all watched him, none of us with much hope. There's been too much in the papers and in detective stories for much chance of a slip on a thing like a gun.

And so it proved. The little guy looked up and said: "Clean! Not a thing, either on the butt or the barrel. Want me to look at the inside?"

I said: "My prints will be all over that. I cleaned and oiled and loaded it just a few days ago. On the way down here."

The corporal said: "That won't be necessary, Jolliffe. It's a cinch the killer didn't take it apart. He probably yanked the slide back far enough to see there was a load in it and let it go at that."

He gave the gun back to the corporal who put it in his pocket. And who told me: "I'm sorry, Morahan, but I'll have to hold this. I can get you another one if you think you'll need it."

"What do you think, Corporal?"

"Well, you were hired to guard the boy, weren't you?"

"Sure."

"You're going to keep on doing it until you're told the job is through, aren't you?"

"Sure."

"Then you'd better have a gun, I'd think."

THE two of them drifted back to talk with Sonny then, and that left me with about a dozen cops I didn't know and the doctor. And with Sawyer, who was talking to him. I went over that way, just so I wouldn't be

standing by myself. I said: "Don't these cops have anything to do? It looks like every cop in this district is on this job."

The doctor said severely: "Mr. Larkin was a very prominent man, young man. A fine citizen—I have known him since he built here. I have been his physician since that time. It's the same with the police. They all knew Mr. Larkin and liked him. He gave heavily to all police charities. The boys take a personal interest in getting this case solved in a hurry, with his murderer brought to justice."

I'd known Larkin for almost four years and said so. I'd also liked the man and I mentioned that as well. And then I thought of something else. I took Sawyer to the side and asked him about it, though, before saying anything to the cops.

I said: "Look, Mr. Sawyer! You'd know more about this than I would. What about those two men, brothers, that were here? Their name was Morrison, I think. There was an argument between them and Mr. Larkin, wasn't there? Maybe they came back and did this."

Sawyer said: "They went North the next day. That next evening, right after they left here."

"Maybe they didn't. The cops could check, couldn't they? There was an argument, wasn't there?"

"Not much of a one, Danny. Amos was a man who liked his own way, I'll admit that, and the Morrison boys are the same type. Anyway they went North."

"They could have changed their minds and stayed over. They could have doubled back."

"Tell the police if you like, Danny. If those two were here, in the house, I'd be inclined to think that way myself, possibly. It certainly doesn't pay to pass anything that might help, I'll admit that."

I waited until the sergeant and the corporal came back and started to talk to the sergeant about it. And he waved at the corporal and said: "Tell him your troubles, Morahan. He's the one to talk with."

I told the corporal and he took their name and their description down in his notebook. And then called one of the other cops and gave him the sheet he'd written on.

"Get on the phone and call the good

hotels in town. Check with the trains. See if these men are still around, or if they left, find out when."

I said: "How come the sergeant turned me over to you with this?" and he seemed to think it was a good joke and on himself.

"Since I joined the force here," he told me, "I've been a lucky guy. I've cracked a couple of funny ones and they think I'm a detective."

"What did you do in Georgia, corporal, if you don't mind my asking?"

He gave me the name of some county and told me he was the chief investigator for the sheriff's office there, and then added something else.

He said: "I've been with the cops since I was old enough. But I get tired of one beat and move on to another force. It's a hell of a way to get any promotion but a man sure sees a lot of country."

I thought he had something there and said so.

He got serious then. "It's like this, on this one, Morahan. I haven't got a thing to go on. I can't see any motive for this one. Not one at all."

CHAPTER V

Inside Job



WASN'T any investigator but I could see a lot of motives for a lot of people. I had one for Mrs. Watson—they'd been mixed up and she might have got sore at Larkin over something. I could see a dandy for Mrs. Larkin—her husband was playing around and maybe she'd just found it out. I could see one for both the Countess and the Count.

If my hunch was worth a thin dime, they were both as crooked as wagon tracks, and maybe Larkin had found it out and told them about it and maybe they'd killed him to keep him quiet about it. There was an additional one about the Count—maybe he'd made a bad pass at Dinah and the old man had seen it. I knew that Larkin had thought ten times as much of the girl as he had of Sonny.

I could see a dandy for Lew Sands, too. That was another bad one, and maybe Larkin had caught wise to his playing around with Dinah. Dinah was the one that was

doing the chasing, but that wouldn't make any difference to her father.

I could see one for Milton Sawyer. While I didn't know a thing about it, there was always the chance that he'd chiseled some money from Larkin in some way—he had every chance to do it—and maybe Larkin had found that out. Maybe he'd threatened him with jail and Sawyer had killed him to cover up the theft. I had no reason to suspect Sawyer—I really didn't, for that matter, but the thing was entirely possible.

Mary O'Day was the only one I'd give a clear board to. She might have slapped the old man's face if he got fresh with her—I knew damned well she could have—but she wouldn't have gone in my room, taken my gun from the drawer, and gone back and blasted him with it. I didn't think Dinah would for that matter, but she was such a little fool I couldn't put her entirely out of the thing.

I didn't think she had a thing to do with it of course . . . it was just that she did have a motive. Her father might have caught her with Lew Sands and raised hell, and she was so nuts about Sands she'd have done just about anything to get him and keep him.

Sonny had a motive, too—but he also had an alibi. He was the only one in the party that I absolutely knew was innocent.

I gave this all to the corporal and he listened and nodded at each one. And when I was through he said: "That's what I meant when I said you'd be a help, Morahan. Now here's what I want you to do. I'm leaving now, and so is the sarge. We're leaving three men here, two inside and one patrolling the grounds. We've talked to everybody and have got nowhere. We made them go back to their rooms after we'd asked them what they knew, and they're in there now."

"Sawyer wasn't."

"Sawyer's different. He helped us. He knew everything that was going on and the rest just knew their own part in it. That's why he was out. I want you to keep your eyes open when they get together again. After we're gone. We'll leave as soon as the ambulance gets here—it broke down and we had to send for another, or we'd have had the body away an hour ago. You just keep your eyes open and if you see anything wrong, you tell me."

Just then the cop who'd done the phoning came up. He said: "They're registered in the Regis. I talked to the clerk and he says they were out all evening."

The corporal said: "Maybe you had something there, Morahan. The sergeant and I'll go down there right now and find out. Then he gave me a number and said: 'Call me there if anything comes up. They'll relay the call to me if I'm out.'"

"Who'll I ask for?"

He laughed and said he thought he'd told me.

His name was Joe Costello.

EVERYBODY got together as soon as the police went away. The cops they left kept out of the way, one of them sitting out in the patio, another in the kitchen, and the third just prowling around outside the place. What good any of the three were doing I couldn't see, but the corporal thought they should have been left and that was good enough for me.

I had a lot of respect for the guy by that time.

Both the Countess and Sonny showed their hangovers badly, this in spite of the stomach pump treatment. Beside that, it was three o'clock in the morning and nobody looks their best at an hour like that. I thought holding a meeting at an hour like that was silly, but I just worked there and what I thought I kept to myself. Anyway, it was Milton Sawyer's idea, and I had a notion he'd be in charge of the family finances for some time—at least until the will was probated.

Mrs. Larkin looked the same as usual. She didn't even seem to realize her husband had been murdered, but I was wrong on this. It was just that she didn't care a damn.

Mrs. Watson looked like the wrath of God after a bad Indian. She had a Mae West figure but it had slumped. She'd had big baby-blue eyes, but the lids were so puffed from crying they could have been any color in the rainbow and nobody would have known. They looked like somebody had smacked her between them. Her nose was red as a beet and as shapeless—it was swollen, too. Her cheeks were all raddled, with the veins standing out, and she hadn't even bothered to put on make-up.

I'd never liked the woman but I felt sorry for her then. She was taking Larkin's death harder than his own people, if looks meant anything.

Dinah looked sullen, and I took it the cops hadn't talked to her the way she thought they should have. If she'd cried, she showed no signs of it. The Count was his usual greasy little self, going around telling every one how sorry he was about "My good friend being so foully murdered."

I could have slapped his pretty little face and loved it.

Sands looked the same. He was the original hard customer, anyway, and I wouldn't have expected him to change expression if he'd watched a train wreck.

The little O'Day girl had been crying and she told me, quietly: "Mr. Larkin has always been so good to me. Like my own good father, who's dead, bless his soul."

THAT was all of them except Sawyer, and I wouldn't expect him to show much emotion. I've never yet seen a lawyer that had any more heart than an iron statue, anyway.

I sat at the side, with a highball, and watched them all. And all except the little O'Day girl had something to match my drink—one of the colored men was a pip of a bar man as well as a butler.

They all said the usual thing. What a terrible thing it was and how bad they all felt. And who could have done it? Who could have had anything against poor old dad, who'd never harmed a soul in his life, or against poor Mr. Larkin, who'd been such a good friend to them, as the case might be?

They all sounded as though they meant it.

Sawyer said the first really sensible thing. He said: "One thing now, folks. It's almost a certainty the killer is one of us. Barring the possible chance of it being one of the Morrisons, and frankly, I don't see any reason for them to have killed Amos. Their dealings with him were highly profitable, they'd have been killing the goose that laid the golden egg, if you don't mind a figure of speech."

"What are you getting at, Milton?" demanded Mrs. Larkin. It was the first time I'd ever seen her show good sense, and I watched her and listened to her and realized

I'd made a mistake when I'd thought she was a fool. She was, maybe, in some things, but she caught on when the chips were down. "Do you mean the rest of us are in possible danger?"

"Just that, Martha."

"Why?"

"Who knows why Amos was killed? Certainly it was over money. Probably over the money he'd leave."

"You infer than, Milton, it was one of the family?"

"No, dear. He left bequests as you know. And in considerable amounts to many people."

"Certainly not to me or my son," the Countess said. "He had no reason."

"There could be other reasons why either you or the Count would have wanted him out of the way, madam," Sawyer told her acidly. "I assure you the police are taking that into consideration."

The Countess said: "How dare you!" but she didn't say it with any push behind it. And she didn't say any more.

Mrs. Larkin said: "Of course money will be behind it. It has to be. Or does it?"

WITH that she gave Mrs. Watson a level stare that told me she'd known what was going on all the time. Either she didn't care about it or couldn't stop it, one or the other—it certainly wasn't ignorance that was holding her back.

Mrs. Watson gave her a blank look and just sniffled a couple of times.

Mrs. Larkin said, and oh so sweetly: "Of course after this you won't want to stay here, will you, Mrs. Watson?"

Mrs. Watson said: "What's that?"

"I said that with Mr. Larkin dead, there's no further reason for your presence here. I'll ask you to leave as soon as the police permit you to go. Is that plain enough?"

Mrs. Watson stopped the sniffing and began crying in a big way. I didn't blame her much—there she was, going along great guns, and now she's out on the street.

I felt sorry for her even if the street was where the big tramp belonged.

I said: "Just for a suggestion, how about this? Suppose everybody goes to bed now. And suppose everybody sees their door's locked. That ought to do the trick—this

killer can't go through locked doors."

Sonny said: "There's more than one key to the doors in this house."

"Where are they?"

He laughed and I caught what he meant. His old man certainly had had a key to Mrs. Watson's room. There was a fair chance that either Lew Sands had a key to Dinah's or that she had a key to his. What the angle was between the Countess and the Count I didn't know—but I was damned well sure they weren't mother and son. As far as I knew, Mrs. Larkin was okay, but I didn't know her very well and Milton Sawyer was a good-looking guy. And her husband had left her alone, and not alone that but had sported another woman right in her face.

The only one I was sure of was little Mary O'Day, and Sonny would have had that key if she'd have given it to him, that I knew.

I said: "Well, it's worth a try. We can't go the rest of our lives with no sleep. At least I can't."

Sawyer said: "I think that's a good idea, Danny. After all, we can't decide anything at an hour like this. Certainly not anything that makes sense."

Sonny said, in a querulous voice: "Whose idea was this meeting, anyway?"

"Nobody was sleeping," said Sawyer, "and I thought a drink or two might help everybody. And I thought that warning might be in order."

So that was that. We went to bed after another drink around, and I didn't wake up until almost noon.

IT WAS Joe Costello who woke me up by knocking at my door, and he told me he almost tore it down before I heard him.

And I said: "Why not? That's the door to the living room and I had it locked. I also had the door to the bedroom locked. And I was sleepy."

He said: "The news I've got won't bring you awake, either, I'm afraid. That Morrison business proved out all wrong. Both the brothers were in a night spot all evening—if not one, then another. And it takes time to make that drive. And they have no car and there's no record of them renting one of the U-Drive-Its or of a cabby bringing 'em out here. We didn't even trust the

people in the spots—we even checked their possible transportation."

"Did you check where Sonny and I were?"

"Sure. They remember Sonny—they'll never forget him. Anybody that tips ten and twenty bucks before he sits down isn't forgotten soon. They'd just as soon not see him again though, tips or no tips."

I could understand that and I told Costello something of what had happened. He thought it was funny but the memory was too fresh for me to go along with him on the thought.

Then he said: "Everybody but you was up and doing. Except the little girl."

"Dinah?"

"Oh, no, she's up. I mean the maid. Mrs. Larkin was raising hell about not waking her."

I knew part of the answer right then. It clicked just like somebody had snapped their fingers.

"Let me get my clothes on," I said. "This is going to be plain pure hell, mister."

"What d'ya mean, Morahan?"

I said: "The kid's dead."

CHAPTER VI

Smart Money



HE colored butler had a spare key so we didn't have to break in the door. The kid had had a nice little room, all finished up with chintzy stuff in blue, with drapes of that stuff on the windows and with the chairs and dressing table finished the same way.

Costello mentioned it. He said: "It's a hell of a room to have a murder in."

There was just the two of us. He had his three cops still there but we hadn't been sure just what we'd find. That is, he hadn't been sure—I'd been sure since I'd heard she hadn't answered her bell.

She was on the bed and it looked as though she'd been killed in her sleep. She was in a mess of sticky bloody bed clothes—and it made me sick to look at her. She'd been wearing a thin little cotton nightgown and the knife had gone right through it, just under her breast. Just that one wound but it had been plenty—she'd died instantly and probably hadn't even known what had

struck her. She probably hadn't even woke up, Costello thought.

The way the killer had come in was as plain. The chintz drapes were blowing in the breeze that came in through the still open window.

She didn't look to be more than fifteen, though I knew she'd been twenty—she looked like a baby in spite of being in that mess of blood.

I didn't look very long. I said: "I can't stand this. I'm getting out. I'll kill the man that did this if I can get my hands on him."

"Don't be a fool," Costello said carefully. "Unless he resisted arrest, you'd hang for it. Let the State do it for you. It's better that way—he has to sit in jail and wait for what he knows is coming. Who is it?"

"I don't know. I know that the kid saw something or that the killer thought she did. That's the only possible answer—this baby never did anybody harm in her life."

"You said 'he.' What makes you so sure it was a man?"

"It would take a man to drive a knife in that way."

"You're wrong, Morahan. A ten-year-old kid could've done it unless the knife struck bone. It would slide in like it was going through butter. You can see where it went in between the ribs."

I looked, though I didn't want to. I still thought it was a man, though if Costello said it could have been a woman, I believed him.

He had experience and I hadn't.

I said: "What now?"

"We go through the same thing. Only I hope that damned ambulance don't break down like it did last night. I didn't mind having Larkin on the floor like that for hours, but it's different with this kid."

"I liked Larkin fine, but it's different with me, too. I barely knew this kid, but somehow it's different."

Costello told me something else then from experience. "It's always different when it's a woman. And it's even worse when it's a kid. That's why most people are lynched, over women and kids."

We went out and closed the door and Costello went into the library and used the phone to call his crew.

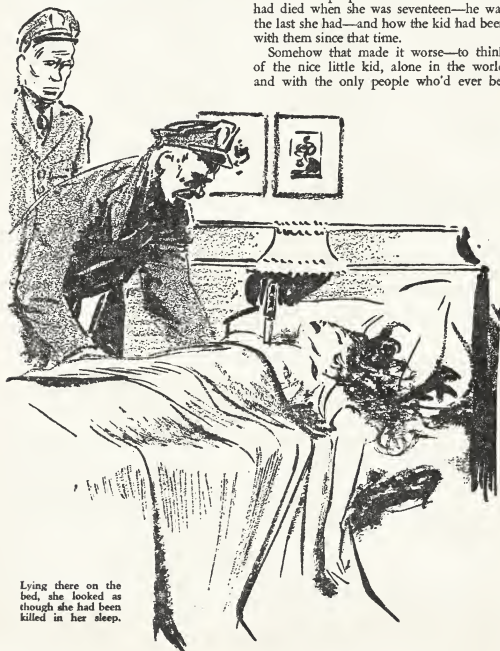
I spent the time in my bathroom being sick.

THIS time the questioning didn't take long. The doctor put the time of death at about five-thirty, when it was still so dark that the cop prowling the ground couldn't have seen a thing unless he'd been within a few feet of whoever had gone through the window. Everybody said they were sound asleep at that time, of course. Cer-

tainly little Mary O'Day had been, because if she'd screamed, either Sawyer or I would probably have heard her. I had my window open and so did he. Hers had been open and Costello pointed out how somebody had cut through the screen, right by the hook that opened it, and had got in that way.

I felt worse then. Mrs. Larkin told us the kid had no people at all—that her father had died when she was seventeen—he was the last she had—and how the kid had been with them since that time.

Somehow that made it worse—to think of the nice little kid, alone in the world and with the only people who'd ever be-



Lying there on the bed, she looked as though she had been killed in her sleep.

friended her, being killed in such a way.

Costello took me to the side and said: "I remember what you told me about Sonny passing at her. It could have been him, you know."

"He might have passed at her but he wouldn't have passed at her with a knife, Mister. Besides that, he wasn't sore at the girl, he was crazy about her."

"She might have turned him down and got him sore that way."

"Hell, man, she's been turning him down a dozen times a day, since I've been here. The Lord knows how long before. And he wouldn't have gone courting with a knife, and you know it. He isn't that kind of a man."

"A drunk will do crazy things."

"He wasn't drunk last night. He was sick



as a dog with a hangover. You can rule him out."

"I don't rule anybody out, Morahan."

"What about me? This is one I don't have an alibi for."

He said seriously: "It isn't that. I think, just like you do, that she was killed because whoever killed Larkin thought she'd seen or knew something. But the cops have to figure every angle—that's their business."

They all went back to town then except the three men still on guard duty, and what the hell good they were expected to be I never did know. None of us were supposed to leave the county but there was no restrictions on us going to town or around like that. We just had to stay in the jurisdiction of the State police, and everybody was not alone willing but anxious to do just that—or at least appeared to be.

IT MUST have been hell for Mrs. Larkin to have to live where her husband and her maid had both been murdered but she never whimpered. Nor did Dinah, and I didn't expect Sonny to. That was another reason I didn't take Mrs. Larkin off my list of suspects—she was taking the whole thing too calmly.

But staying there like that gave me a chance to go over everything—we went out in the speedboat some, Sonny and me, and the Count kept chasing Dinah and Dinah kept chasing Lew Sands, and things seemed about normal.

There was always that thought behind every move though—somebody you were eating with and talking with was a killer, twice over. And that don't help your appetite or your flow of conversation—that I found out right then.

Sawyer was the best off in the lot because he'd had a job to do. He was in the library for the next two days, wiring and phoning up North and going through the papers Larkin had brought with him to work on. He had something to do—something to take his mind off what had happened—and I'd have given my share in Heaven to have been in the same spot.

All I had to do was think about the murders and why they'd been done—and it's no wonder that I finally caught on to something.

And I did it an easy way.

SAWYER called me in the library and gave me a nice smile. "Would you do me a favor, Danny?" he asked. "Take a trip to town for me? Mrs. Larkin is going to need Sands this afternoon."

I said I'd be glad to get away from the house for a while and he said he thought we all would.

He went on with: "There's a boat at the docks downtown that just came in from Jamaica. Its name is the *John P. Johnson*—it's a converted lumber schooner—you know they're using everything that can carry cargo these days."

I said I'd heard that.

"I've been trying to get hold of the skipper on the phone and I can't catch him. He'll be around the boat, sooner or later, and you could spot him if you were there. His name's Josephs—just ask for Captain Josephs. When you find him ask him to call me here."

"Sure. I'll be glad of the excuse to get away."

"Take any of the cars. Sands will see it's gassed and oiled. Tell him I said to see you on your way."

"Sure."

That was all there was to it. Sands wanted me to take the little Dodge they used to carry groceries back from town with and I laughed at him. Instead I got a Buick sedan, with only four thousand miles on the ticker—and I had a swell time driving in, taking my time, just loafing along. And I had a swell time at the docks, locating the *John P. Johnson*, which turned out to be a half sail, and half motor ship.

And Josephs was on the boat, talking to what I took to be some custom man of some kind. I waited until he got through and gave him Sawyer's message, and he nodded and said he'd call as soon as he could get away.

That left me free so I sort of strolled around the boat and looked it over. I'd taken enough liquor off boats to judge a cargo pretty well, and they had a lot of theirs on deck, which helped. I judged the load to be between eight and nine hundred hogsheads of rum, it was marked so on the hogsheads and from what I saw and the cargo space I knew was below, it had to be about that many.

Then I drove back and told Sawyer I'd delivered his message all right.

He said: "Mr. Larkin had many and varied enterprises, Danny. It's a wonder one man could have gone into so many things. He'd contracted with Captain Josephs to bring over a cargo of sugar, but the captain had this priority load of rum to bring. Those little boats have done a lot for our war effort, believe me."

I said I supposed they had—that I'd never thought much about it—and then forgot the whole thing.

And then I read the newspaper article. It was plain enough. It had a picture of Captain Josephs standing on the deck of his unloaded boat and it went on to say how small converted vessels like that were holding the West Indian trade, while the bigger steamers were making the long run overseas, with cargo for the Army.

The pay-off was when it said the *John P. Johnson* had just brought back four hundred and twenty-five hogsheads of rum.

I'm not smart but I'd played the rackets long enough to know one when I see one. And I'd seen the boat and the cargo, and that was enough. I didn't do a thing—I just waited until the next night, when Sonny decided he wanted to go to town and wanted me with him.

I went to town, but I parked Sonny in the first cocktail place we came to and kept on going.

I went to the OPA.

I HAD the usual time with Sonny, but managed to keep him out of fights and out of fights myself. It took a bit of doing, too—Sonny had been a good boy too long, and wanted to break loose and tear things up. I got him home a little after two, though, and one of the cops still on duty at the house helped me carry him inside and to bed.

For the next two days nothing happened at all. Corporal Costello came out, supposedly checking things to see they were all right. He got me to the side and in the first five minutes he was in the house.

He was more excited than I was—I was sure. He said: "It checks out, Morahan. It checks out. Hickey told me to tell you there were nine hundred and twenty barrels of

rum on that ship and that it only reported in as having four hundred and twenty-five. D'ya know what it means?"

I said: "Sure. I've figured it out. It makes about five hundred hogshead difference. Checked in legally that five hundred kegs would be worth about a hundred thousand. Bottled and taxed and all, the customers would pay about three bucks a quart for it instead of the four dollars a gallon it stands at the dock. But leave out the taxing and selling it for what it could bring in the market, that hundred grand worth of rum's about two and a half times that. That's rough figuring because I've been out of the business quite a while, but it won't miss it far."

"Hickey's tracing the shipment now. He's got somebody going right along with it."

I said, from experience: "It'll be diverted to some warehouse along the route and listed as turpentine or something like that. If they can bribe a customs man like they must have to have passed a shipment like that, why they can fix it up with some shipping clerk on the railroad. For that matter, if they can get it to the freight yard, they don't even have to bother with that. All they've got to do is paint out the heading on the hogsheads and relabel them."

"That's what Hickey said. Morahan, I want to apologize. I figured you were sort of a dope and here you step into something really big."

"Trying to kid me?"

"Hell, no."

I said: "This is just a drop in the bucket. Sawyer didn't start this, he's just carrying on what Larkin started. And you don't think Larkin was just fooling around with small potatoes like this, do you?"

"I don't get it."

"If he was fooling with black market rum, or bootleg rum or whatever you want to call it, he'd have been fooling with something else. He was a money-maker and a big one. I'd have never known the guy except my bar was near the financial district and a quiet little place where he could duck in and not be bothered by people. I stepped into something a damn' sight bigger than a deal in bootleg rum, mister, believe me."

"I still don't see how you caught wise, Morahan. I've tried to figure it out. As I

get it you just happened to notice the boat had more of a load than the papers said."

"That was part of it. Now look! Sawyer tells me he wants to talk to that Captain Josephs but that he couldn't catch him on the phone. That could well be, but it also could be that he didn't want a call going out from this house, where it could be traced back, and that he wanted the captain to call him on a pay phone instead. I know that trick—that was one we used in the old days and plenty. Now that isn't enough. But here's a full load on the boat that's reported as half of a load. The two of them together add up—two and two make five, when they come like that. Then, when you put a double murder on it, you don't get two and two and two make six, but they make about sixteen."

"You think it was Sawyer that did the killings?"

"Sure. But how are you going to prove it?"

Costello thought about it and admitted he couldn't think of a way. I'd gone nuts trying to, myself, so I knew how he felt.

I SAID: "About the only thing to do is coast another couple of days and see what Hickey can dig up here and what his little pals up North can find."

"How come you told Hickey to get in touch with you through me?"

"Because it's a cinch if an O.P.A. man called me at the house here, I'd be third on the list. As it is, every time I make a move I've got to dodge Lew Sands."

"D'ya think the boy's in on it?"

"Hell, no! I think he knows about it, though."

"Any reason for it?"

"You bet. There was a young fellow up North who was very chummy with Sonny. This kid, his name was Alderdyce, was turned down by the Army and he was a very patriotic kid. He started out to beat the black market all by himself, and he ended up dead in an alley. I think that he found out something through Sonny, or through running around with him and being at his house or something like that. I think Sonny knows about it but wouldn't turn his old man in. Sonny's not patriotic—all he's looking for is a good time."

"It sounds reasonable."

"Another thing. The old man never cracked down on him for anything. He let him do as he liked, just paid his bills. I think the old man knew Sonny was wise to what was going on and was afraid to say anything to Sonny about what he was doing."

"The little rat!"

"Not so. He was brought up that way, is all. He was brought up to think anything's all right that you can get away with. And that anybody that joined the Army was a fool. There was plenty of kids like that before Pearl Harbor, Costello, and you know it. The colleges were full of them."

"Most of them got over it."

"My kid brother did, Mister. That's one reason I'm interested in this mess."

"I didn't know you had a brother."

I told him I had two and where they were and just how I felt about them. Costello told me he'd tried to join, himself, but that his feet were flatter than pancakes and that they'd told him he'd do more good in the job he had than in the limited service they'd have to give him if he joined up. I told him what they'd told me when I tried, and we had a nice little chat about Army doctors and their mistakes.

Then he left, but not before warning me to be careful, something I assured him I'd be.

And I tried to be and didn't do too bad at it.

CHAPTER VII

Guarding Sonny



IN THE first place, I started wearing my gun and not in any holster. I tucked the thing under my belt inside my shirt and kept a jacket on and buttoned so nobody would notice a bulge. You can jerk your coat open, tearing off the buttons of course, and take your shirt out of your pants with the same grab. This with your left hand, of course. That leaves the butt of your gun in the handiest place in the world to grab—that across the body draw is up to now, anyway, the fastest way the boys have yet discovered. I've got the front sight of my gun smoothed down—it used to have a square Call sight but I took the front corner off with a file. I rounded the

outer edges of the back sight, a Patridge, and that couldn't catch in my pants any more than the front.

THE gun itself, a Colt .45 Automatic, is the Target model and a sweet little gun after you get used to it. I carry it with the hammer back and the safety on, which is the thing to do if there's any chance of having to use it. That's as safe as leaving the hammer down and the safety off, and a man can throw off that safety faster than he can get his thumb up and yank back that stiff little hammer.

Costello had taken it but he'd brought it back to me as soon as he thought I might be in any actual danger, and I was glad he had. It's a lot of satisfaction having a gun that you're used to and trust—and it gives a man a lot more confidence.

I packed the thing two days and nothing happened except that Costello came out and told me Hickey had the rum shipment traced to Norfolk, Virginia, and if ever there was a town that could take up a load of bootleg stock that was the one. There are State liquor stores there and the people are rationed until getting a drink is a day's wait at one of the local dispensaries. The town's full of war workers with a lot of dough and with sailors who've got enough, and there are plenty of outlets around the town, as well as in the town itself.

I know nothing about the police there, but a town with a force just big enough to take care of a normal hundred and sixty people can't take care of three times that with the same number of cops.

I figured it was a sweet spot to unload the rum—even better than farther North.

Costello said: "And Hickey's been going back into other rum shipments and he's uncovered at least three other times the same thing's happened. They've taken the customs man that let it through up, along with three others, for Federal Court, but they're keeping it quiet until they find out what's what up North."

I said that was swell and he left—but I'll always think that Hickey's investigations were the tip-off for Sawyer. That was close to home—and four men can't be spirited away like that without some talk. Of course Josephs, the *John P. Johnson's* skipper, had

been taken up right along with the others, and he might have found out that way.

Anyway, found out he must have.

I was taking a walk along the beach with Sonny when it happened. There was no particular reason for it—Sonny had wanted to go to town and make whoopee and I'd talked him into taking a walk, instead. I didn't know it but the Count and Countess had gone ahead of us, probably to talk over future tactics, but it wouldn't have made any difference, anyways, the way the thing turned out.

We were just loafing along, with Sonny picking up shells and pitching them at birds flying by and kid stuff like that. We were right down by the surf, and every now and then we'd have to step back so the wash wouldn't catch us. Sonny had asked and I was telling him something about the way they used to bring the liquor trucks down from Canada, in the prohibition days, and how if the way was greased the way it usually was, the only danger a man ran into was from hi-jackers.

I did notice Sonny acted pretty nervous but I put that down to wanting to go to town and celebrate. And then a young fellow like that who's just had his father murdered is bound to be nervous—or so I thought.

We were almost to a little point when Lew Sands came down through the brush and to the ocean to meet us. I thought that probably he'd had a date to meet Dinah down that way and thought little about it—but I was canny enough at that to open my coat and get a grip on the front of my shirt, just above the gun's checked grip.

I've never lost anything yet by playing safe.

Sonny said, as if surprised: "Why here's Sands. That's funny, ain't it?"

The minute I heard his voice I knew I was in for it. I noticed then that Sonny was also wearing a jacket, something he never did except when going out in company or when waiting for somebody to build up the fire for him.

I was between them—that is Sonny was nearer the water than I was and Lew was coming down from the shore side. Lew was sixty yards away and walking fast and purposely. So I decided to start the ball.

I yanked my shirt away and got my hand on the gun and spoke to Sonny at the same time.

"On your face, you punk," I said.

He had his hand up as though he was going to scratch his chin. I could see the play as if it was written out. Lew Sands would start blasting about any time, and when I turned, as of course I would, why, Sonny would have a shot at me he couldn't miss. He wasn't ten feet from me.

He said: "Ugh—ugh!"

I said: "On your face!"

THE damn' fool started for his gun and I yanked mine and waited for his to come in sight. And when it did, I shot him through the thigh.

I sort of liked the kid and didn't want to either kill or cripple him too bad. And I didn't have time to see if I'd put him out of action or not—by that time Sands was close enough to do me damage and he was the one I was afraid of.

He was close enough for comfort at that. About thirty yards away, standing there and trying to take a bead on me. He got it just as I turned and I could see the flame bloom out from his gun muzzle just the faintest fraction of a second before I heard the gun.

I didn't hear the slug but it must have been close. Any man that's ever shot a pistol much, and it was a cinch that Sands had, couldn't miss very much at that range.

But I shot back and I missed, too. Nervous, I guess—I know I was plenty excited. It's one thing to shoot at a target and another thing to shoot at something that's shooting back at you—and I supposed it affected Sands the same way.

He shot again and he didn't miss. He almost did but not quite. I felt a tug at my pants and my leg jerked under me, but not enough to let me down. I tried back, twice, as fast as I could get him in the sights and pull the trigger and it was the second one that got him. He started ahead, but dropping the arm that held his gun down by his side, and he must have taken at least half a dozen little steps before he caved in and went ahead on his face.

I swung back to Sonny and he was squirming on the sand just like a fish some-

body's pulled out of the surf. He was screaming—but so help me, I hadn't heard a sound. He'd dropped his gun, with which he could have shot me half a dozen different times, and he'd wriggled his way at least six feet from it.

Then I looked past him and saw the Count and the Countess running toward me. And, believe it or not, both of them were screaming, too. The Count as loud or louder than the Countess. The Continental idea, I suppose. I saw they had empty hands and didn't pay them any more attention but went up to look at Sands.

I'd caught him just to the side of center and at the base of his throat. What had kept him on his feet as long as he'd stayed there I couldn't understand, except that possibly he'd been leaning ahead against the recoil of his gun and had gone ahead to hold his balance. He was as dead as mutton, so I went back to Sonny.

BY THE time I got there the Count and Countess were there, too. She was kneeling by him and she turned and glared up at me and screamed: "You murderer!"

The Count started to pick up Sonny's gun and I flashed mine out while I waited to see what he was going to do with it. He looked up from it to see me watching him and I thought he was going to faint. He dropped the gun as if it was red hot—and it was for him, if he'd known it. I'd always hated the sneaky little punk, and in the state of mind I was in at the time, I'd have blasted his leg out from under him as fast as I had Sonny's.


I said: "You two get on back to the house in one hell of a hurry and tell 'em to send somebody after the kid. I'll stay here and wait and look after him."

The Countess said: "I will not move one step, you murderer. You would kill him, the minute I left him."

"Nuts! Get moving! And fast."

I had no intention of shooting her but I accidentally let the muzzle of my gun swing toward her. She squawked like a chicken and got off the sand—she was on her knees—and she made the first hundred yards like a sprinter.

The Count had taken off when I first suggested the errand.



This time, the questioning
didn't take very long. . . .

I looked at Sonny then. He'd quieted down—he was crying and saying over and over again: "I've been shot! I've been shot!" but he'd quit his fool squirming and was lying fairly still. I pulled his pants down and off him—the right trouser-leg was saturated with blood, anyway, and saw I'd missed the bone entirely, but that I just had. The slug had gone clear through, of course—it takes bone or a lot more of a leg than the kid

had to stop a big slug like that at that range. I'd hit an artery, though, probably the big one there, because the wound was pulsing with each heartbeat.

I took his belt off and put it above the place and tightened it with his own gun.

He cried about that, too—said it hurt him. It was hard to believe he was the same one who'd planned on mouse-trapping me with Sands.

Then I looked at myself and found what I'd expected to find. Sands had creased me—his slug had cut a shallow groove along the outside of my leg. It was about four inches long and not over half an inch deep in the middle of it, and while it stung and smarted and ached a little, it didn't really hurt.

I sat with the kid and talked to him, and he was in a shape to talk. I helped this out, maybe, by telling him I'd take the belt off his leg and let him bleed to death right there if he didn't talk, but I don't think I needed to do that.

He'd have talked anyway—he didn't have what it takes to play those sort of games.

I GOT the lowdown on a lot of things that were going to be handy to know. His old man was heart and soul in the black market, as I'd figured out. When I told him who'd killed his father he didn't believe me.

He said: "Why, he told me you did that. He was sure. He said you'd probably slipped away from me during that evening."

"What made you believe him?"

"Because of Mary O'Day. He said that she was killed because she'd seen whoever had killed dad, and that's why she was put out of the way. And then he explained why he was sure you were the one who did it."

"What was the argument?"

"Why that you and she were in the same wing. He told me that nobody from the other wing could have gone around the house on the outside like that and gone through her window without running into the guard. It sounded like good sense."

"Didn't you stop to think that he was in that same wing?"

"Why, no! Somehow I never thought of Milt doing a thing like that."

I said: "Well, I'll be honest, kid, and tell you I didn't either. I was as much up in the air as you were, until I found the reason he killed your father. And then everything made sense—everything clicked at once."

"You mean that black market stuff?"

"Sure. He knew your father's business inside out. He'd have the use of your father's money, at least until the estate was settled. For that matter, your father probably had a bunch of dough sunk away because of taxes—money hidden in different places. He could get his hands on that and have all the capital he needed to run with. He couldn't have taken over your father's legitimate business that way but he could take over the racket. Why did your father ever go into the thing? He was doing all right the way he was."

"You didn't know dad. He went all the way. Lock, stock, and barrel, Danny!"

"Yeah!"

"I wouldn't have cut in with Lew Sands like that if I hadn't thought you'd killed dad. Honest, I wouldn't."

"I believe you, kid. You thought the cops would never prove it and that you'd have to take the law into your own hands."

"That's what Milt said. How'd you know?"

"I knew what he'd say without hearing him say it. You're lucky, kid—I think I can pass this off as an accidental shooting, if you want it that way."

"I'd like it, Danny, you know it."

I left him then and went up and looked at Sands' gun, which was where it had fallen. I was leaving it there until the cops came—I wanted my story to be clear. It was a short-barreled .38 Colt Detective Special—a belly gun and the probable reason he missed me as he did. They're a good little gun but not made for long-range stuff—and when a man's shooting back at you, thirty yards is a long, long ways.

I went back and said: "It'll pass, if Costello tells the doctor not to be too fussy. Now I'll loosen the belt for a minute to keep the circulation going and then I'll tighten it up again. Then we'll keep on waiting."

"How long will it be, Danny?"

"That depends on how screwy that Coun-

tess and her son are. I wouldn't bet a thing one way or the other."

"What d'ya mean?"

"There'll be trouble about this, too, kid. I wouldn't put it past those two to pack up and get out and not say a word."

"They wouldn't do that."

"Why not?"

I decided then that the kid had more brains than I'd given him credit for. He said: "They saw you kill Lew Sands—he'll stick around now, thinking he's got more of a chance with Dinah. Dinah'll have money of her own, now."

I told him that he maybe had something there.

CHAPTER VIII

Three-Time Killer



RS. LARKIN led the parade with Dinah a close second. Then came the butler and the five colored men servants, Mrs. Larkin was crying and waving her hands like she was crazy. Far behind them all I could see was the Countess and her son bringing up the rear.

I said: "Okay now, Sonny! Here comes just about the whole household. And I'll bet not one of the damn' fools thought of bringing anything we can use as a stretcher."

I'd have lost. The butler had a blanket. They had other things, too. A first aid kit—Dinah had thought of that. An ice bag, and whose idea that was I never will know. A beach chair, one of the long ones that you lie down in. A thermos of hot coffee and a quart of whiskey and a quart of rum—Mrs. Larkin said, quite seriously, that "Poor dear Sonny sometimes drinks whiskey and sometimes drinks rum."

They had the first aid kit but I was the only one that knew how to use it. So I used it first on Sonny and then on myself.

I said then: "I don't see Sawyer. How come? Didn't he care if Sonny was lying at death's door?"

Mrs. Larkin said: "Why, he said he'd follow right along. He was going to telephone for a doctor and an ambulance."

I knew then what had happened. My leg was stinging some from the antiseptic, but I could walk on it all right. I'd had a

little time, chasing the help away from where Sands was lying in the sand, and I turned that job over to the butler.

I said: "You'll have to help carry the boy back, of course. But I want you to pick the best boy of these and leave him here until the police come. Tell him not to touch a thing. I've got to get back to the house in a hurry."

He said: "Yes, sir."

I told Mrs. Larkin I'd go back to the house and get things ready for Sonny at that end and by that time, of course, the Countess was there, ready to put her oar in.

She said: "Don't let that man leave here, Martha. He shot Sonny—he'll escape."

Sonny wasn't feeling so good by that time but he heard that all right. He said: "Tell that old witch to keep her mouth shut. It was Sands that shot me. He must have lost his mind. He just started shooting at us, and if it hadn't been for Danny, he'd have killed both of us."

Mrs. Larkin said: "Is that right, Mr. Morahan?"

"Why, sure. The first thing I knew Sands started shooting and then Sonny fell and I started to shoot back."

"But I tell you, Martha, that my son and I saw the whole thing. This man here shot Sonny down in cold blood and then turned and started shooting at poor Sands."

Mrs. Larkin looked bewildered, but she wasn't fooling me any on that. She was smarter than she acted and I knew it.

I said: "Well, Sonny would certainly know who shot him, wouldn't he?"

And turned and started back to the house.

WE WERE about a mile and a half up the beach and I never thought I'd make it. It wasn't that my leg was bothering me so much—it was that I was getting the kick-back from the excitement I'd had. And I was worried about Sawyer and whether Costello could catch him before he got clear away.

There was no question in my mind about him having made plans about a getaway, just in case. I thought that was probably the reason he'd worked Sonny up into going along with Sands on trying to kill me, for that matter. I figured he'd heard about

the investigation that was going on and had realized his number was up, and was going to skid out and knew I'd stop him if I was there.

Or at least give the alarm so he'd be stopped. It was the only possible explanation for the attack on me. He had hired Sands, certainly, and he'd talked Sonny into it just as a matter of policy. There was always the chance that Sonny might have been a help to Sands in the job, and Sawyer had nothing to lose in any case.

I got to the house and found nobody there but some colored maids and the cook. Sawyer had cleared out, taking the big car—and he had better than an hour's start on me. I called Costello and told him what had happened and he said he'd be right out.

I said: "To hell with that. Try and stop that damn' Rolls before it gets out of the country."

"I did that before I came out, Morahan. Don't get excited."

"Excited, hell! I've got the answers to everything. The kid knew about it, just as I told you he did, and he spilled the works."

"You tell Hickey yet?"

"I'll call him when you hang up."

He hung up and I got the OPA man on the line and told him what had happened. He talked calmly enough but I didn't think he felt that way inside. He said he'd keep in touch with me and with Costello and that for me to take care of myself."

That last crack was the tip-off to how high he was up in the air. I started to tell him what I'd found out from Sonny and he listened a minute and said:

"Good Lord, Morahan! I'll be right out. This is big! Big."

I said I'd wait for him.

And then I sat down and waited for the rescue party to come back with Sonny—and I had a bottle of Scotch and ice and soda right alongside of me. Scotch tastes to me a little like medicine, but I thought that was what I needed.

HICKEY got there right after they brought Sonny back. I'd forgotten all about calling the doctor and the ambulance—but I passed that hurdle by saying that I'd thought Sawyer did. I just had time

to tell him what I'd learned from Sonny when Costello steamed up. He told us he'd put out a stop order on the Rolls and that it was just a question of time before it was picked up.

Well and good. It wasn't five minutes later—I wasn't through telling him about the shooting—when he got a call that the Rolls had been found. Up the road at a little station thirty miles away. And that Sawyer had managed to get on one of the refugee trains going North.

They called them refugee trains because they ran them just for people who were stuck in the State. A lot of them had reservations for months ahead but that made no difference—the trains, that is the Pullmans, were jammed full and they had to run these chair cars to take care of the overflow.

Costello said: "Have him pulled off at the next stop. Wire ahead—you've got his description."

I could hear the phone rattle back at him and then he said: "Damn it! Then have them stopped. I can't take a chance of him getting off in between."

He turned to us and said: "There's going to be a hell of a row about this but it's the only thing to do. He tells me the train's jammed full, and that there'll be no chance of picking Sawyer out of it. He looks like any other middle-aged business man come down here for the season and stuck, and that train's full of them."

I asked: "Can they get them to hold a train?"

"For a three-time killer they can, Morahan, believe me. Want to go along—you and I are the only ones that can identify him. It's in the next district—all the boys that were here at the house are on patrol—we're as near as any of them."

I said I wanted to go along, naturally. We piled in Costello's car, and if I thought Sonny was a fast driver—and I did—I found I hadn't seen anything. That State trooper put his foot on the gas, all the way down, and he left it that way from the time we left the house until we pulled into a little whistle stop a hundred and ten miles north. So help me, if that car had wings, we'd have taken off and flown. We made that hundred and ten miles in an hour and

fourteen minutes and that's driving, even if he did have the siren to help him with all the traffic and on all cross roads.

He slammed into this little station wide open—his radio had told him where the train had been stopped—and when we got there we found four troopers patrolling outside the train. Boys from this district, that weren't sure what we were looking for but who'd been told that nobody got off there.

Costello took one of them with us and the two boys and Hickey and I started through, going down from the head end.

I NEVER saw anything like it. Every seat was full and the aisle was jammed with luggage. The racks overhead were piled so they bulged. There were half a dozen men standing in each vestibule, which should give an idea of how crowded that train was.

We went all the way through and it took half an hour. By that time we had two conductors with us, and they, the poor devils were going crazy. They were going to complain to the Governor—they were going to lose their jobs or at least their seniority, if they didn't get underway right then and there.

Costello was a pretty sick man by then. He'd held a train—not a good one but still a train that had a schedule to maintain—for an hour and a half and he didn't have a murderer to show for it.

And then I got a brain storm. I said: "Listen, Corporal! There's one place we didn't look."

"I'd like to know where."

I told him and we went back through again.

WE FOUND him in the third car from the back and Costello had to threaten to shoot the lock out of the door before he'd open up. He was in the washroom, of course, all bolted in. He came out, cringing like a pup, and this in spite of us finding two guns where he'd tried to hide them in the fuse box that was stuck in there.

Costello said: "You're under arrest, mister, for murder. Three murders, to be exact."

Hickey said: "And if you should by any chance beat that, the Government wants you for OPA violations. I don't think

we'll ever get you, though—murder takes precedence over our charge."

Sawyer didn't deny but part of it. He said: "Three murders. I don't understand."

"Killing Mary O'Day," Costello said.

Sawyer just looked at his feet.

"Killing Amos Larkin."

Sawyer looked at the handcuff that linked him to the State trooper who'd gone through the cars with us.

"And killing a boy named Alderdyce."

Sawyer looked up at that one. "He said: 'You can't put that one on me, Corporal. Sands did that.' And then he turned to me."

"Did you really kill Sands?"

I said I had.

"I don't understand it."

"Why?"

"Sands was supposed to be a good man with a gun."

I laughed at that one.

We took him off the train and loaded him in Costello's car and he didn't have a word to say except just once. And we were half-way back to the house before he said that.

It was: "I suppose Sonny told all he knew?"

I said that Sonny had opened all up.

And that was all.

Sawyer got life and Sonny got a pat on the back from the cops for being an innocent victim of Sands' wild shooting. However, the Larkin family didn't fare so well at that because the Government levied on the dough Larkin had pulled out of the black market and really made it stick.

They still had more than enough left, though. His legitimate business had always been a money-maker and they had better than three million dollars to split between themselves after all taxes were paid.

Of course I didn't know about that until quite a while afterward. I was on a job—Hickey had got me one with the OPA as an investigator—and it just happened they sent me South again. And it just happened I drifted into one of the spots Sonny and I had favored with our trade, during the time of the murders.

This was three months after Sawyer had been tried.

The first thing I heard was somebody bawling out: "I'll buy a drink for the house!"

Sure enough it was Sonny. I went over to his table and met a dirty-looking blond wench I wouldn't have walked down an alley with. Sonny was as drunk as a skunk and looked like hell—but he seemed glad to see me.

I said: "Folks down, too, Sonny?"

"Dinah's married," he said.

"To the Count?"

"Oh hell, no. They arrested those two. Just after we went back North. Some bunco game they'd run on a woman out in Chicago. I haven't heard another thing about them."

"Who'd the kid marry?"

Sonny straightened up and looked proud. "A guy in the Army. And Danny, he was only a private, not even a private first class, and you know what?"

I said: "What?"

"By golly, he's already a second looney. He went to that officer's school and made second looney. And only in a year and a half. We're pretty proud of him, all of us."

This from a black market family.

I said: "How's your mother?"

"Mother's fine. She's chairman of the bond drive up in Connecticut. We've got a place up there, too."

"And you?"

He said, and I got another explanation of why he looked so bad. "I'm working here at the Port, Danny. I just got off a seventy-two-hour shift. We're running short-handed and a man's got to put in extra time to keep things moving."

I shook hands with him and was proud to do it.

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Expressions May Not Betray Them

IT WAS one of those murder cases that are tried in the newspapers long before they ever get to court. In this particular instance, a man had been poisoned, presumably for his insurance, and the district attorney felt that the man's wife was responsible. In due course, the grand jury returned a first-degree murder indictment, and soon the woman would be placed on trial for her life.

The accused hired a prominent criminal attorney to defend her, and it was not long before the district attorney was requested to permit the defendant to undergo a lie-detector test. Naturally, the prosecutor was very reluctant to permit such an "illegal" display, but the defense attorney strenuously insisted, appealing to the D. A.'s "good sportsmanship." The final result, of course, was that a lie-detector test was arranged. Three university professors of psychology brought their apparatus along with them to the county jail, and the defendant was examined in detail as to the commission of the crime. When all the results were in, they were found to be negative.

According to the lie-detector, the defendant did not commit the murder. Whereupon the learned attorney for the defense insisted that the indictment be immediately quashed. But this was refused, and the defendant was made to stand trial for her life. After hearing all

the evidence, for and against, the jury returned with a verdict of murder in the second degree, after the judge had refused to admit evidence as to the lie-detector findings.

Just what is a lie-detector, and why has it not been recognized as good evidence by the courts? Well, first of all, a lie-detector is neither magical nor mysterious. It is simply a series of measuring and testing devices which, operating simultaneously, do nothing more than to indicate a person's blood pressure, heart rate, frequency of breathing, and degree of perspiration. Naturally, if a person is lying, his heart will beat faster, his breathing will be more rapid, and his blood pressure will go up. Also, he will tend to sweat.

But there is one trouble, and the law recognizes it. For some unexplained reason, some people are more accomplished liars than others. Some people *can* lie without showing it, and not only will their facial expressions not betray them but even their innards will remain on an even keel. As a result, they are not subject to detection.

Possibly the future will bring us a more accurate measuring device. But until that day comes along, the courts of this country will be inclined to reject all lie-detector tests, and will place their faith in the American jury system, which by and large has hung up an enviable record of justice rendered.



By DALE CLARK

The blonde says, "I'm not in uniform and what I do is none of your business. Kindly don't annoy me."



Stripes for the Sleuth



OW it starts, we find this girl crying on the Henry Street bridge. So Corporal Zimm tosses a flash onto her, and it's just in time to catch her pounding the rail with her little clenched fist like she wishes to bust this bridge down barehanded. Also it shows she has got a shape like a pin-up girl in *Yank*, the soldiers' own weekly. Her face

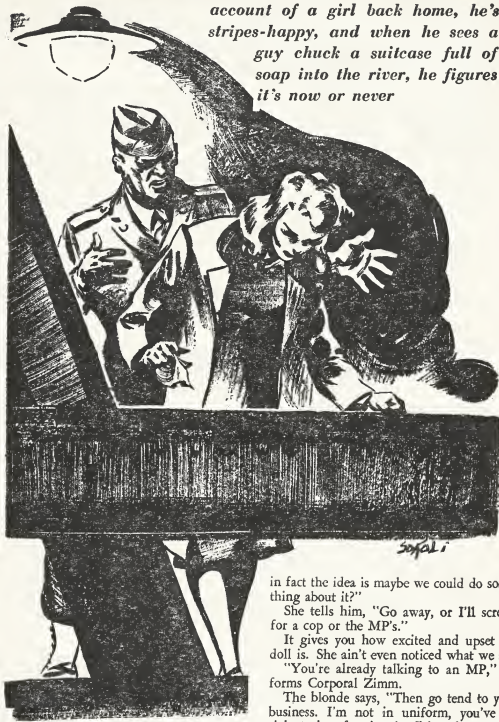
we can't tell about, it's that tied up and white and wet with crying.

So Zimm steps up and says, "Pardon me, miss, but is there something wrong?"

This girl shows the back of her pageboy blonde bob to us. All froze up like a statue looking the other way, she says: "Please, kindly don't annoy me."

"Far from it," says Zimm. "It looks to me you're already annoyed serious enough,

Corporal Zimm, MP, is really desperate to be a hero. On account of a girl back home, he's stripes-happy, and when he sees a guy chuck a suitcase full of soap into the river, he figures it's now or never



in fact the idea is maybe we could do something about it?"

She tells him, "Go away, or I'll scream for a cop or the MP's."

It gives you how excited and upset the doll is. She ain't even noticed what we are.

"You're already talking to an MP," informs Corporal Zimm.

The blonde says, "Then go tend to your business. I'm not in uniform, you've no right to interfere in my affairs whatsoever."

It's a brush-off, and I start walking. I'm about to the end of the bridge when Zimm falls in again.

"Chick," he says, "that was funny—mighty funny."

"Aahh," I says, "she was prob'ly just likkered up to a crying jag."

"No, she wasn't. She didn't smell of nothing except perfume."

"Well, it's no skin off our Schnozzles," is what I think of it.

We go on along Henry Street a few steps. When all at once he pulls up in a snappy halt. "Hey," he says, "you hear something?"

"Sure. I hear a hunnerd jukeboxes." I ain't exaggerating Henry Street so much when I say it. The drag is just one dive after another, the kind of spots which has young whiskey behind the bars and very seasoned B-girls out front. Recent, a couple these percentage queens has slipped the Finn to a pair of Marines which they jackroll, so when these Marines wake up in back alley, they go back to the joint and play Tarawa games. I mean they really mop up, they hardly don't leave a whole bottle in the place. So now this whole skidrow is out of bounds for the entire military, and is why we're patrolling it.

"What I hear," says Zimm, "sounds like a splash, like somebody jumped in a river."

I listens and says, "She ain't hollering for no help."

"Suicides don't," he says.

He runs back and looks, and there ain't any blonde on the bridge now. Well, this is a high bridge. There is room a river boat can pass under it. Zimm throws his eyeballs around, and he picks out some concrete steps that slant down from this end of the bridge to a kind of docks down there. He whirls and goes at them stairs three to a clip.

I'm slower; I figure I got only one neck to break. So has he, but he is striking for sergeant's stripes. He is really desperate to be a hero. He has got a half interest in a girl back home, the other half her heart is claimed by a guy in the Air Corps which is tail gunner in a flying Fortress. This other guy is already a sergeant six months, besides his job is more romantic.

So when I get down to these docks, Zimm is already crouching down and reaching for something white on the water.

He says, "Hell afire, Chick, look here!"

He holds it up to me, and I'm surprised all right. "It's soap," I says.

It's a new bar, too. The corners are still square, it hasn't gone soft and cruddy the way soap does when it's in the water any time at all.

"Yeah," Zimm says. "And have a gander down here."

I LEAN over the edge of this dock, and I see floating around a lot more of this same. There must be fifty, sixty bars swimming by where the current makes an eddy in to the docks. Some of them has still got the wrappers on, the others show up white and shiny against the black color of the water. The suitcase I don't see until Zimm throws himself flat on the dock and grabs a hold of my ankle so he can reach out and rescue it.

It is just a brown pasteboard suitcase which the ceiling price of would be about 98 cents. It hasn't got even any straps to the thing.

Zimm, he lifts it up and smells inside.

"Throw it back in," I says, "it ain't worth keeping."

He shakes his head and he says, "I don't understand this at all! I don't get it, do you?"

I get this much, what he heard splash in the water wasn't the blonde.

"Yeah," he says. "But soap's a wartime shortage, so why should someone go throw a whole suitcase full of it in the drink?"

"Maybe they want to give the fish a nice clean swim for a change."

"It's a mystery. It don't make any more sense than you do, Chick," he says.

"Well," I wish to know, "what's it to us?"

It seems it has got to be something to him because he drops that bar a soap into this wet suitcase and lugs both them up the stairs.

I just tag along; he's the guy that's bucking for sergeant. Though I got an idea he won't even be a corporal for long, not should an officer see him lugging this keister on duty in the out of bounds district.

He marches it a good long block, that takes us to a newsstand on the corner there. Zimm asks the news hustler, did he see a somebody heading toward the bridge with such a suitcase?

"No," says the newsstand Joe, "but I seen a guy with two such a suitcases, only they

was heavy, practical pulling his arms outa his sockets."

"What kind of a guy? Tall, short, fat, thin—?"

It's no use, the Joe is doing the sidewise with his head. "I dunno, all I noticed is he turned outa the National Hotel across the street. He headed for the river. I remember thinking don't he know the street-car stops right on this corner? He don't have to walk no block to catch it, I thinks to myself."

There is probably a thousand high-class hotels named the National in the U.S., but alongside of this one a foxhole would look good. It's fresh dirt in a foxhole, see? The cobwebs in the corners of this dump had got grey with dust, and you could plant a Victory garden in the floor cracks. You could plant it, but there would never seep in enough sunlight to make anything grow.

It is a lobby about as big as a boxcar. There is just room enough to walk between some empty, brokedown chairs on one side and on the other side a shelf where the clerk hides behind.

First time the clerk don't seem to hear, he puts up a hand and builds himself a elephant ear. He is a long-face drip, in fact he is downright pessimismical.

Zimm asks him again, who's the guy just checked out?

"Nobody checked out," the clerk says.

"Walked out with a couple suitcases, anyway."

"Nobody has took any suitcases out, either."

We go outside. I'm thinking, "Nobody ever stayed in this flea poogie would have any use for one bar a soap, let alone fifty. I bet the guy come from sowheres else, what he done was set his suitcases down in the doorway to rest a minute."

"We'll ask," says Corporal Zimm. He does, up one side the street and down the other. But it's like dice. After that one roll, we couldn't turn up the same number again.

So finally Zimm goes over a couple blocks to the bus terminal and he puts this suitcase in a rented locker, and for my part he's a sucker to waste a dime on it.

It's the next day and at camp and I'm in the post buying a pack of smokes when

he calls me over to where he's studying the morning paper. "Look here," he says.

The piece in the paper is so small I know he has been searching for it especial; you'd never notice it by accident. It says—I saved the clipping later on:

Police today are seeking a clue to the identity of the blonde young woman who last night visited James Bork, 42, at the approximate hour of the latter's death in his room at the National Hotel, 909 Henry Street. Hugo Leon, manager, told officers the girl fled from the hotel in a state of violent emotional excitement.

That's all there's to it; the thing's just another flophouse tragedy, it ain't worth spilling ink over it—so far as a reporter could see.

Corporal Zimm, of course, sees it different. "Damn the luck," he says, "why don't they tell the details? This don't even reveal how was the guy killed."

I go farther than that, it don't say he was killed. He dies of smallpox, maybe.

Zimm says, "No, the cops ain't seeking the blonde, does this Bork die of his own accord. It's a murder, but that's all I can make outa it. The paper don't even name who found his body."

"The chambermaid did," I guessed.

"Even a crummy joint like that must have a bedmaker."

He says, "Don't be silly. This here's a morning paper. They put morning papers on the press at three, four a.m. No hotel chambermaid is gonna be cleaning house before even the Army's awake, hell's sake."

He drums his fingers on the newspaper.

"I dunno," he says. "We better co-operate with the cops. I better call 'em and tell 'em where that suitcase is at."

I tear a cigarette getting the first outa the pack.

"What for?" I says.

"Why," he says, "on account this suitcase proves the dame can't be guilty."

"How? The keister never come outa the hotel at all—we checked on it."

"But the clerk's got 4-F ears," Zimm says, "so anybody could sneak by if he happened to be looking the other way."

I says, "So what? What's a suitcase full

a soap got to do with murder, supposing it is murder?"

He frowns serious. "Right there," he declares, "you put a finger on the crux of the entire mystery. Once I dope out that angle, I got it as good as solved."

Right there, I think, I put a finger on the crux of what ails Corporal Zimm. He's stripes-happy; he's so crazy to wear a ser-

says, "Okay, John Law wants to see us, and I see Captain Darnell so we're off duty tonight."

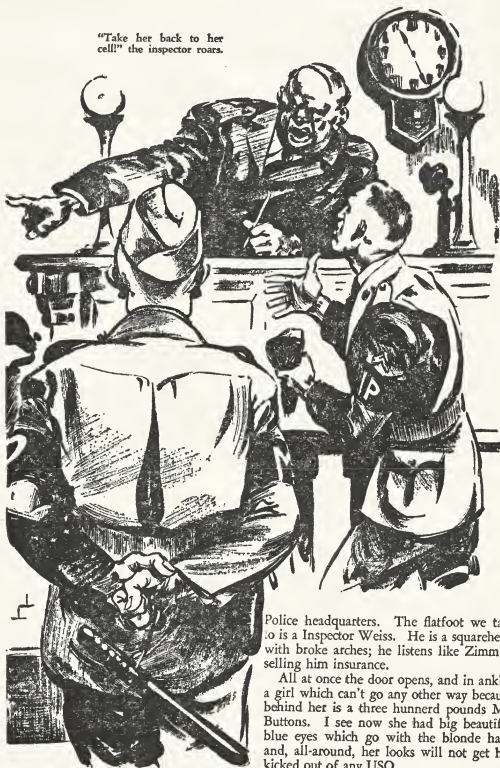
I GOT no complaint, in fact I'm all for a day off, but then I don't know how we're gonna spend it. First we stop in the bus terminal and pick up the keister, from there we head for the Homicide office in the



geant's chevrons on his sleeve he's actual dreaming of catching a killer to do it.

So he goes and phones the cops, and then he goes over to the Administration Block, and both cases he must put up a terrific spiel. Because when he comes back, he

"Take her back to her cell!" the inspector roars.



Police headquarters. The flatfoot we talk to is a Inspector Weiss. He is a squarehead with broke arches; he listens like Zimm is selling him insurance.

All at once the door opens, and in ankles a girl which can't go any other way because behind her is a three hunnerd pounds Mr. Buttons. I see now she had big beautiful blue eyes which go with the blonde hair, and, all-around, her looks will not get her kicked out of any USO.

Corporal Zimm takes one swift look; then he whips up his hand quicker than he could salute a four stars general and he takes off his barracks cap. "Pardon me, miss," he says, "but you should've let me help you last night and maybe you wouldn't be in this trouble."

The blonde just stares at him, and then she turns on the waterworks the same as the first time we see her, or more so. Inspector Weiss grins and he tells the Mr. Buttons, "Take her back to her cell, that's all we wanta know."

"Hey!" says Corporal Zimm. "Wait a minute!" he says. "She ain't guilty! She didn't have no suitcase a soap with *her*," he says.

Weiss goes for this soap business like it's K ration when he has already a Thanksgiving dinner onna table. He strictly ain't interested. "She ain't got no alibi; she wasn't to home playing cribbage with her uncle like she says," he informs us. "This story a yours puts her within a block of the National Hotel. With Hugo Leon it makes three material witnesses seen her acting suspicious on the scene of the kill." He stands up and says, "Thanks for dropping in, I gotcha military addresses when it comes to trial."

What's to do but scam? We scam.

"Well," I looks on the bright side of it, "we done our duty, what say we throw in some beers whiles we regurgitate?"

"You mean cogitate, you dope."

"I mean throw in some beers."

"No," Zimm says, "it's no use trying to solve this mystery just thinking about it, we ain't got enough brain fodder to go on. What we gotta do is investigate that National Hotel set-up for some clues."

I don't want any part of it, or even any part of Henry Street. It's out of bounds; this time we got no official excuse to be there, so trouble there means we get brigged. I can see trouble in what he's heading for.

I try and argue him some sense. "Why?" I says. "On account a floosie which you don't even know her name?"

"She's no floosie," Zimm says. "She's a innocent babe in the woods, a victim to circumstances."

I tell him, "I look the doll over, and I don't see the guaranteed Grade A pasteurized label."

He says, "Listen, no Henry Street floosie could ever be dumb enough to turn her back on two strange guys that accosts her onna bridge. It shows how she's unexperienced innocent, don't it?"

"Or," I says, "it shows she's smart enough to hide her face from us."

WE'RE still arguing when we get to the National Hotel. It is not any more sanitary by daylight. There is the same sad drip behind the clerk shelf. Zimm goes into a spiel; he gives with the information we is doing a MP beat outside, which the drip no doubt already knows.

Well, says Zimm, he has got a brother coming to visit him in a couple days, just stopping over between trains, and Zimm explains he ain't been able to get leave that night.

He just wants to reserve his brother a room where he can drop in and see him without leaving the beat—he offers to register right now, and start paying rent to hold the room.

The clerk has a look in his eye like he had heard a similar story before. "I'm sorry, we haven't got a available room."

"That's what you gimme last night," Zimm says, "but I know better. You got the room the murder was done in."

"The cops put a French key in it," the clerk says.

Zimm pretends to think and finally he says, "Well, at least let me talk to Mr. Leon about it."

"That's me," the drip declares.

So it's no score. We go outside and Zimm says, "There's nothing left but the alley, we gotta climb a fire escape."

I could freeze water putting my fingers in it, but still I say, "It's a swell idea, only we don't even know which room it is."

He says, "It's three hundred and nine; I read it off a report on Weiss's desk. That's the third floor, and that hotel's built too narrow to have rooms on both sides of the hall, or would it have more than one window to a room, all we gotta do is count back nine windows from the front of the building."

Yeah, that's all we gotta do—for a starter. After that, comes playing leap frog off some packing boxes onto the fire escape.

OUT to camp we got a mentality conditioning course, which is where you crawl a hunnerd yards under barb wires whiles they shoot off machine guns forty inches above the dirt your face is in. Going up this fire escape, I keep thinking what a nice comfortable swish a .30 caliber sho-sho slug makes—compared to the racket two pairs G. I. shoes on a steel ladder steps.

It is just another dollar-a-night hotel room when we get inside, so far as I can see. The only clues I notice is a bed and two chairs, a running water basin in a corner, a bureau, and a clothes closet.

But Zimm says, "Hey, the rug is untacked here besides the window."

So he rolls this old shabby carpet back, and there is a lotta paint spilled onna floor. I see more and different colors than in all the campaign medals in this War, and it's mostly in tiny splashes, like they was throwed from a salt shaker.

The corporal seems kinda pleased, but I save up my feelings until we are down off that fire escape again, and then I am really glad. It don't last longer than it takes Zimm to reach the corner newsstand and buy a afternoon sheet which the Joe is just unwrapping. By now the story has moved up to the inside of front page, and Zimm reads it as we walk along.

"Well, anyway," he says, "here's the girl's name — Marian Bigelow, 1125 Sumter Street," he says, "I guess we better go prowling her room next."

I tell him at this rate he is not gonna get sergeant stripes but a whole stripes suit. I also tell him I will not climb any more steel stairs by broad daylight, but will stand onna ground and holler, "Fire!" does he need a explanation of being there.

But this Sumter Street layout is a doll's house complete with roses and a white pickets fence. "Nobody can't mind if we stroll in and admire the flowers," Corporal Zimm says. Of course, what he is up to is casing the place for a open window; and he finds one, but there is a guy sitting inside of it.

We can't see his face, as he is parked at a desk and dialing onna phone. But even from his back, I see he is some sort a Mr. Buttons himself. He has on a blue benny and stripes with gold braid down the sides

of his legs, and laying onna desk in front of him is a cap which has a shield that says *F. A. M.* But what gets me is what *he* says.

"Hello," he said. "I wanna confess to a murder. My name is Horace Bigelow, and I'm the guy that really killed James Bork."

No doubt somebody is highly surprised onna other end the wire. They would be still more so if it is a television phone so they can see what Horace Bigelow does after he hangs up. He picks up a heater which lies there besides his cap, and cocks it, and holds it to his temple.

Then he starts reciting the Lord's Prayer.

ZIMM makes a motion to me, so I hold him my two hands like helping a dame get onna horse. He puts his foot in my hands, and I boost, and he rises up silent and in over the window sill, and grabs this gun with his thumb under the hammer so it can't possible shoot out Horace Bigelow's brains by surprise.

"Here," Zimm says. "How about some explanations before you do the Dutch?"

"I already tell the police all it is necessary to explain," the fellow says.

"You don't tell 'em *why* you killed Bork," Zimm points out.

This Horace Bigelow sighs and says, "His name isn't really Bork. It's Bigelow, the same as my own. He is my half-brother and the family black sheep. In fact, twenty years ago he commits a crime for which I am convicted and spend two years in the pen, so I finally kill him for revenge."

"Baloney!" says Zimm.

"Why," says this Bigelow, "what you know about it?"

Corporal Zimm points to the cap and says, "I'm cultural enough to know *F. A. M.* stands for Fine Arts Museum. You're a hack there, ain't you? And since when did they start hiring ex-cons to guard them priceless pictures and so on?"

Bigelow sighs some more and looks very old and tired. "Well," he says, "I lied to you. Twenty years ago I serve some time under a assumed name. My half-brother knows about it, he has been blackmailing me by threatening to expose my record to the Museum, which would cost me my job. That's the real reason I killed him," he says.

"Is that all?" Zimm asks.

"There's another angle," Bigelow admits. "I have a niece which herself has a swell job as private secretary to the curator of the Museum. Naturally, I want to protect her from disgrace."

"And what about the suitcase fulla soap?" says Corporal Zimm.

Bigelow stares and swallows and mumbles, "I don't know what you mean."

"No," says Zimm, "you don't. Because you never killed anybody at all. You're just saying so on account you figure the cops will hafta let Marian go."

It's one of the few times I see a growed man shed tears. "*She ain't guilty*," Bigelow weeps. "Good God, the girl wouldn't murder her own father! No matter what he done, she couldn't cold-bloodedly kill him!"

Zimm wants to know, "Well, what *did* he do?"

"I don't even know," Bigelow sounds despairing. "I can't imagine why she went to his room last night."

If he's lying again, there's no time to argue about it. These last words are drowned in my ears by the sounds of a siren coming closer.

"Thanks," say Zimm, "for the lend of your gun. I'm taking it so's to be sure you're still alive when the Law arrives."

He hops out the window, and whiles we lam across the back yard the cops are running across the front one.

ZIMM hasn't been kidding about the cultural angle, he really knows where he is going and does not stop and ask anybody how to find the Fine Arts Museum. He has even got a rough idea of where to locate the door labeled *Curator, Private*.

"Well," he says, "you are a private, Chick, so this time we ain't breaking or entering illegal."

Anyway, what we run into inside is a very flustered-looking doll at a desk.

"We wanta see the curator," Zimm tells her.

"Concerning what?" she asks.

"I am just back from overseas," Zimm says. "I have got some very rare curios which the Museum will jump at a chance to buy."

You can knock me down with a feather-weight when she fumbles with a memo pad

and decides, "Oh, yes, Mr. Spalding is expecting you."

Naturally he ain't—not when he sees us. This Spalding is quite a rare old curio himself, as he is equipped with white whiskers and has a yellow gold watch chain across his fancy vest, and I bet three-to-one he has on a long suit of underwear.

"Er, ah, ahem," he says, "there is some mistake. It is a new girl out front; most unfortunately my private secretary has been arrested for murder. I am expecting Major O'Neale at any minute now. I'll have to request you gentlemen to make an appointment for some other day."

"Major O'Neale is what we're here about," bluffs Corporal Zimm.

It is his worst yet, he is really pulling the wires onna booby trap now. Because what is this Major O'Neale gonna say when he arrives any minute and finds us transacking business in his name?

"I don't understand," says Spalding, looking worried. He has got nothing on me, as I don't understand neither, and am a hunder times more worried. "Surely," he says, "nothing has happened to the major or to the Ming dragons?"

Zimm takes the words right outa his mouth. "The Ming dragons," he replies, "is what we're here about."

It starts Spalding to wringing his hands like he is washing them—and he has got plenty a perspiration to wash in, too.

"How dreadful!" he says. "Oh, I knew I should never have let them out of my sight. Why, they are priceless, unreplaceable. Indeed," he says, "they are the only known specimens in the world in addition to the pair which we already possess."

"You mean," says Zimm, "you already got one couple of the same?"

"Yes," says Spalding, "in our Oriental Room."

"You want to lay a little wager on it?" asks Corporal Zimm.

The curator goes goofy-eyed. He don't even get the idea, let alone hand back any change outa it.

So Zimm says it twice, but in different words. "Are you positive your dragons ain't been stolen to be sold back to you?"

"Why," gags Spalding, "that's preposterous and impossible!" But all the same, he

clips out the door and down a hallway and into this Oriental Room. We're at his heels.

The old guy leans up against a plate glass showcase, and points inside, and says, "No, they're here. My goodness, you gave me a start—it would be a thirty-thousand dollars loss to the Museum if true."

I hear him say this, but it don't make sense, as to me these dragons are just two hunks of costume jewelry. They ain't even got any diamonds or rubies in them, nothing but some kind a china or porcelain.

CORPORAL ZIMM makes no comment, being busy rubbernecking around the edges of this showcase. The next comment is made by Spalding, causing me to break out in goose pimples as big as golf balls.

"Why," he says, "here you are, Major O'Neale. Your men have just been telling me—" and he freezes up, because all a sudden he must realize he don't know what it is Zimm has been telling him.

I practical throw my arm away, I snap into such a salute. The major is a big burly officer all decked out in Air Corps insignia, and I got a feeling I see him before, but I can't place where. I got another feeling I know where I am going to see him again, and that is in front of a court-martial.

In fact, I am in such a condition of mental misery I am took by surprise when instead of saluting back Major O'Neale fans his hand inside his tunic and brings it out aiming a sneezer.

"Get 'em up!" he shouts. "Mr. Spalding, these rascals aren't my men at all—they're nothing but a pair of common crooks! I'm gonna take 'em in charge and hand 'em over to the camp provost officer," he says.

If he says he's gonna hand us over to a firing squad, I think I'm panicked enough to swallow it. But not Corporal Zimm. The Corporal says, "*Wuxtry! Murder! Read all about it!*"

When I hear that, why, it clicks in my sounce where I see the major before. What's fooled me this long is, a guy looks different in a uniform than standing on a street corner peddling papers.

So I dive at him from one side of the showcase, and Zimm peels off on the other side. The newspaper Joe can't cover the both of us with the gun; actual what happens he

shoots between and busts the glass inna showcase.

We hit him high, low, and about every other place. If he's Hitler, half of the War would be over then and there.

But Spalding wails, "Why, the dragons—!" and faints away before he finishes what he's trying to say, which is that with the bullet and the busted glass the thirty thousand bucks is cut to pieces.

Corporal Zimm looks and laughs and says, "Just as I thought! You can shave with what that brick-a-back is made outa!"

THE rest happens at police headquarters again. The cops got Horace Bigelow there, and Marian Bigelow is also in onna party. The newspaper Joe is in another room with some dicks to encourage his conversation. Where we are, Corporal Zimm does most the talking.

"The crux of the entire mystery," he says, "is you can use soap to carve things outa. That's what James Bork, or Bigelow, done—he carved out some imitation Ming dragons. And why he has a wholesale supply of soap in his room, it's hard to paint those imitations to pass for the real thing. I imagine he spoils fifty trying to turn out one perfect fact-similar, judging by the paint splattered onna floor."

"Yeah," Inspector Weiss agrees so far, "but how's he get the real ones out and the phonies in?"

"James was very expert with locks," blushes Horace Bigelow. "To tell the truth, I caught him hanging around in the Oriental Room last week. So far as I could tell nothing was taken, so I merely warned him to leave the building at once. We are arguing when Marian came along and overheard us."

It is the blonde's turn to get a word in edgeways. She says, "I was terribly shocked to learn my father was leading such a life. I begged him to reform," she says, "and finally he promised to do so if I would stake him some money. Last night, I took the money to his hotel but he was dead when I arrived there."

This is where Corporal Zimm tunes in. "He was prob'ly afraid to go through with the caper when he had been reconized."

(Continued on page 96)

Hallett came back from the army wounded, and a nervous wreck. It was hard for him to take up his law practice and fight criminals in his home town. But he had come back, too, believing in something more than himself....



An EYE For An EAR

By GEORGE A. McDONALD

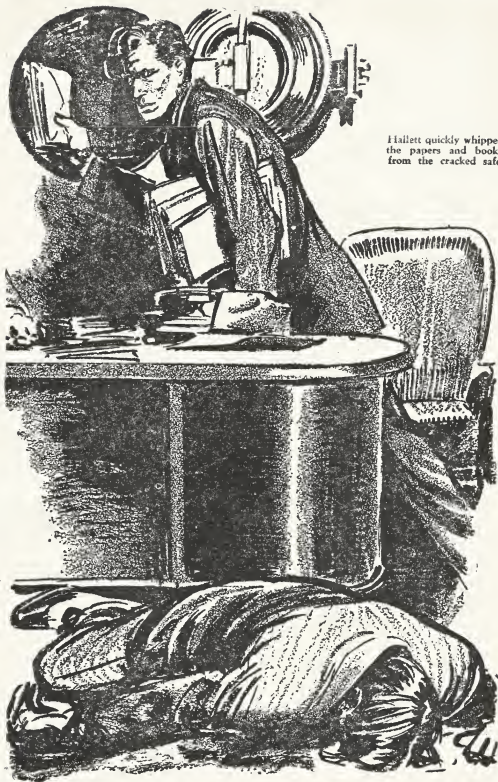


EIL HALLETT'S dark eyes blazed as they moved along the jury box. His lean figure was tense as he gesticulated with his right hand, emphasizing a point to the eight men and four women there. The left arm and hand, plastic reproductions the Government had given him to replace the bone and flesh he left at the Salerno beachhead, remained inert at his side.

"Every shred of evidence against the de-

fendant is false," Hallett said passionately. "Bill Allen had the temerity to defy the clique of racketeers that now rules Valley City. He obeyed the laws of his country and refused to sell black market gasoline. He couldn't be bought, intimidated, or starved out, so he was despicably framed. For being a decent citizen, he stands before this jury, accused of being a criminal."

A muscle quivered in the young lawyer's gaunt cheek. His mouth was a tight, bitter slash in his lean face as he paused.



Hallett quickly whipped
the papers and books
from the cracked safe.

"Consider the true facts," he begged the jury. "Bill Allen has built up a small chain of filling stations with a lot of work and a little capital. Gas rationing and bans on driving diminished his business. He was approached with offers from the racketeers. He refused to deal in black market gas or to purchase counterfeit gas ration coupons. He saw his remaining bit of business shrinking. The supreme sacrifice of walking or using buses was too much to ask of the majority of citizens of our fair city. They can buy black market gas at nearly any filling station here, except Bill Allen's. They forget that women and men are dying on foreign battlefields while the rats in Valley City are fattening on the fact that those troops need food and gasoline that should be gladly given up by our citizens."

Dave Temple, the district attorney, moved uneasily in his chair. The full mouth beneath the dapper blond mustache lost its cynical smirk. Heads were beginning to nod in acquiescence in the jury box. Hallett wasn't vocally using his own army disability as an example of self-sacrifice. The inert arm and hand were speaking for themselves, as were the insignia of the purple heart and the tiny ribbon of the Distinguished Service Medal in the dark-haired attorney's lapel.

"Bill Allen stood by his principles. If the real Americans in Valley City wanted to help in the war effort, he was there to serve them, even if it took every dollar he had saved in the days before a bad heart kept him out of active service."

Hallett felt that he had the jury's interest and at least partly in agreement. It was an honest jury, a fact which had surprised him. The racket leaders evidently believed they had Bill Allen cold or they would have stacked the jury list. He took a step toward the jury box, his thin face was a bitter mask.

"This was unforgivable in the eyes of the vultures preying on our citizens. Our tradesmen might be led to believe they could defy the organized rackets. The stubborn fool who defied the czars of crime had to be eliminated. And this is what was done:

"Although Bill Allen's sales had dwindled to practically nothing, his largest filling station which he operated himself, was broken into. The few paltry dollars in the till were stolen. to make the burglarly look

good. I charge that burglary was a fake, and used only as a means for planting counterfeit tickets in that gasoline station, so that the O.P.A. inspectors, who came there bright and early the next morning on an anonymous tip, could find them. No local crook would waste his time breaking into Allen's station. Working hand in glove with the master crooks who run this city, they knew there would be no money there—"

DAVE TEMPLE was out of his chair in a flash. He ran toward the jury box, screaming raucously:

"That's a damned lie! Hallett isn't presenting evidence—"

Judge Henry Rand's gavel hit the bench with a crack that sounded like the shot of an automatic.

"Order! Order in the court—" he rasped. Then his bleak blue eyes widened on Neil Hallett.

The young attorney's body had begun to tremble. His right hand had whipped up to cover his right ear; his artificial left hand and arm were shaking as the muscles of the stub of that arm tried to lift them. The lawyer's dark face was a mask of terror, his dark eyes were wide and staring.

The district attorney caught Hallett as he was about to collapse. Temple looked like a St. Bernard carrying a whippet as he partly lifted, partly dragged the quivering, nervous wreck that a second before had been Neil Hallett. Temple eased his legal opponent into a chair. His beefy, pink-jowled face mirrored concern as he looked up at Judge Rand. Spectators had risen, querulous voices were asking what had happened.

Judge Rand's chiseled features were expressionless. He pushed his lean fingers through his iron-gray hair, stared down at the shaking lawyer. His gavel pounded again. He said crisply:

"I declare this court recessed. The sheriff will take the prisoner back to his cell. Clear the court, bailiff!" His eyes again fixed on Hallett. "I would like to see the attorney for the defense in my chambers!" The judge left the bench, a tall, austere figure in somber black.

Neil Hallett's head rested on his right forearm on the table. His jangled nerves,

exploded by the crack of the judge's gavel, were beginning to return to normal, but the ringing in his ears was still there as it had been in those months in the hospitals after the land mine had blown him thirty feet to lie in a shell hole for nearly twenty-four hours. The memory of those horrible hours, still gripped his mind. The terrific bursting of enemy shells around him; each shell bringing a new horror to his pain-tortured mind. The concussion had finally dulled his ear drums. For a long time, at the base hospital they had feared he would be stone deaf. In Halloran, they started teaching him lip reading, until a brilliant surgeon had found a method of reviving the auditory nerves therapeutically.

Hallett hadn't heard Judge Rand's command. When he had regained nominal composure, he lifted his head. Everything had been blank from the second that gavel had cracked. Seeing the questioning look in Neil Hallett's eyes, the district attorney touched him on the shoulder.

"I'm sorry, Hallett," Dave Temple said. His full, red lips framed a sympathetic smile, but Temple's brown eyes were sardonic. "Old Rand declared a recess. He wants to see you in his chambers."

Hallett's slender figure was bowed as he made his way unsteadily to the judge's chambers. Henry Rand had removed his black robe. He sat at a table, strumming on its polished surface with thin, bony fingers. He nodded his grizzled head toward a chair. When Hallett had slumped into it, Judge Rand said:

"Why don't you give up this hopeless fight, Hallett? Ever since you've come back from the Army you have been fighting unsuccessfully against the lawless element that seems to rule Valley City. Before you enlisted you were a brilliant and successful young lawyer. Since you returned, you haven't won a case."

Hallett made a dispirited effort to interrupt. The judge held up a lean hand. He continued: "I know! You have been confronted with witnesses committing perjury and juries that were plainly packed. But now that your enemies have learned that you are a neuro-psychiatric and super-sensitive to sudden noises as a result of your harrowing experience overseas, they will

make life in a courtroom unbearable for you. You saw what happened today. It happened last week before Judge Symmes and before that in Magistrate Curlan's court. You can't do justice to your clients and you are preventing a cure that can be effected only through rest and quiet."

"You advocated submission to gang rule?" Hallett asked bitterly. "I thought you had sworn to uphold justice."

"I'm thinking of you personally," Judge Rand said stiffly. "My court will always dispense justice." Then his own voice had an acrid tone. "For that reason, I won't be re-appointed when my term expires. I've raised an extravagant family. I'll have to go back to the practice of law, to keep alive the short span I have remaining in life."

"It looks as if I can't even do that," Hallett said. "Law is the only thing I know. I can't do manual labor—not with this—" He slanted his pain-glazed eyes at the artificial arm and hand. "Maybe I should accept the offers that Salvy Rizzio's stooges have made me."

"Rizzio tried to bribe you?" the judge asked sharply.

"Not in so many words. But visions of lucrative compensation and estate tax cases were dangled before me, if I quit bucking the ring."

"Do you think Rizzio is the head of this criminal clique that has taken over the rule of Valley City?" Judge Rand asked eagerly.

"Hell, no. Salvy is strictly a strong arm man. He can tell his mob how to intimidate butchers, filling station operators, and liquor dealers. But he'd never have the brains to figure out a neat frame-up like the one Bill Allen stepped into. Rizzio is one of the front men for the master mind who runs the police, most of the courts, and pretty nearly runs city hall. I've been a sucker to buck a setup like that. I gave plenty to Uncle Sam. From now on, I'm going to be on the receiving end."

"You can't do that, Neil," the judge said quietly. "After all, I've watched you grow up. You would be foolish to wreck yourself completely trying to break up this evil ring in your present physical condition. Go away for a few months. A complete rest and change of scenery will overcome your neurosis. After all, if you were a per-

manent shell-shocked case, you never would have been discharged from the hospital."

"What would I use for money while taking this rest?" Hallett asked savagely. "No, your honor, I'm going to employ the old political adage, 'If you can't lick 'em, join 'em.' I think I'll be one of the mob's fair-haired boys."

HE GOT up, stalked out of the chamber without listening to the protests of the grizzled jurist. The courtroom was empty, except for two people. Hallett was glad Dave Temple wasn't there to gloat over him again. The big, beefy district attorney was riding high under the new regime. Or maybe the regime was riding under Temple. Dave was smart, ruthless, and ambitious as hell. He had a smart brain, despite his bland, innocuous surface veneer.

Pain touched Neil Hallett's dark eyes as he saw the slim, lovely blonde girl in the dark silk suit coming from one of the benches in the courtroom. Bess Allen's hazel eyes showed no disappointment over the melodramatic fiasco that had abruptly ended Hallett's plea for her brother's acquittal. Rather her smooth, oval face was shadowed with concern for Neil Hallett's well-being.

There had been a time when Neil Hallett hoped to share his rising fortunes with Bess Allen. He had enlisted without ever telling Bess about those hopes. On his return to Valley City, he had found no serious rival in the offing. His decision immediately to plunge back into law and to break up the racket ring had been made with an unspoken desire that she would share his success when Hallett had reestablished his law practice. Now that was all washed up.

His lean face was an inscrutable mask as Bess halted directly in his path.

"I'm sorry, Neil," she said simply. "It was a foul trick. Dave Temple did it deliberately because he knew you were convincing the jury of Bill's innocence. You had the case won today. You can win it again, when it is retried."

"I'm sorry, Bess," he said flatly. "You'll have to get a new lawyer for Bill. It wouldn't be fair to you or to him, to let

Temple send me into a tail spin like that again. I know when I'm licked—and this is it."

Bess Allen started to protest. Something deep in the bitter dark eyes, deep-sunk in Hallett's gaunt face silenced the plea before it was spoken. Her slim shoulders stiffened and her firm little jaw squared.

"Maybe you are licked, Neil Hallett," she said coldly. "But I'm not. I'm going to prove Bill's innocence, if I have to kill some of the rats who framed him."

She turned on her heel and marched down the aisle of the courtroom. Her cheeks flew red signal flags of anger. Her slim, shapely figure was straight as a ramrod. Hallett followed her with bitter, mocking eyes. Bess Allen was better off without a physical and moral weakness like him clinging to her sympathies.

HIS lean face was impressive as Salvy Rizzio left the last bench in the room. The racket chief's swarthy face matched Hallett's for inscrutability. Rizzio pulled a pack of cigarettes from the pocket of his two-hundred-dollar pin-checked suit, scratched a match with a thick, hairy, expensively manicured hand. His blocky body seemed to get into Hallett's path without definite motion. Rizzio was big, but he moved with a lithe, feline grace.

"Your girl friend looked mad, counselor," he said flatly.

"I told her she'd have to get a new attorney," Hallett spoke tonelessly. "Got something on your mind, Rizzio?"

"I'm wondering what's on your mind, Hallett," the big man said softly. "Are you still keeping on with this crusading stuff?"

"I'm not that stupid, chum," the lawyer grated. "I've had enough. I'm heading for new pastures. Maybe I can get a job writing briefs for some good lawyer."

"A good lawyer could make money right here in Valley City, if he had a lot of connections. You are a good lawyer, Hallett. That's why I think you ought to stick here."

"Your boss might not agree to that," Hallett said grimly.

"Maybe my boss ain't my boss any more," the racket chief said cryptically. "Come out

to my house tonight. I've got plenty of use for a smart mouthpiece who knows he's working for Salvy Rizzio and only for Salvy Rizzio."

Hallett's mouth pulled down at the corners. He said:

"What have I got to lose, Rizzio? I may come out at that."

Neil Hallett's brain was still in a turmoil as he walked up the curving

drive to the big, white stucco house Rizzio had purchased on the outskirts of Valley City. He tried to tell himself he was just looking for more information concerning Rizzio's cryptic crack about his boss. Deep in his heart, he almost admitted that he didn't care whether Rizzio was going to try to take over the black market and extortion rackets or not. He was still embittered toward the people who had let crim-

"I'm sorry," he said. "You'll have to get a new lawyer for Bill. I know when I'm licked."



inals grab off the ruling of their city. He had lost an arm and shattered his nerves for people who were too wrapped up in their own interests to give a damn about the four freedoms he had bled to save. He would be a prize goon to keep fighting for complacent morons like that.

As he trudged up the gravel path, he wondered why Rizzio hadn't posted guards around his place. The movies and gangster books always had the racket chief guarded by gunsels. Then his sardonic grin etched deeper in his lean face. Rizzio had nothing to fear. His mob had Valley City right in the palms of their strangling fists.

Hallett saw the lower right wing of the big house was lighted. A long veranda ran along the left side of the house. The lawyer's sunken chin lifted suddenly. He thought he caught a moving shadow near one of the French windows on that veranda. He stepped onto the grass, moved in a swift diagonal line across the lawn. He was right. There was a figure there, flattened against the wall, partly hidden in the shadow of the overhanging roof of the veranda. His interest quickened. It was a woman, standing there hesitantly reaching toward the latch of the full length windows.

Curiosity impelled Hallett to crouch and run toward the veranda, using the shrubbery of the lawn as a screen. As he drew nearer, the woman stepped into the slanted oblong of light in front of the window.

Neil Hallett's breath caught in his throat. He didn't know whether the cry he tried to utter reached the ears of the woman who was opening the French window. He called again, louder this time:

"Bess! Bess Allen! Wait—it's Neil Hallett calling!"

Either the distance was too great or the blonde girl was too deep in her own emotional conflict to hear him. Her slim figure disappeared from view. At the same split second, a muffled crack, like the explosion of a small caliber gun, came from the room. Then a woman screamed.

Hallett's brain started to quiver. But through sheer will power, he fought off the jitters that the gun shot had threatened to launch. Bess Allen was in there. Perhaps she was murdered! He was sure that fright-

ened scream had been torn from her throat. Deep seated emotion—tortured fear for the girl he loved—licked his neurosis. Neil Hallett found his long legs pumping across the grass.

It wasn't easy, mounting the veranda with only one hand to pull himself over the rail. Somehow he made it. Her name was on his lips as he plunged into the room. Then he halted. Once again his tortured nerves threatened to plunge him again into that chaotic state of hysteria.

He gritted his teeth, forced himself to take in every detail of the room. His eyes flicked from the crumpled body of Salvy Rizzio sprawled beneath a voluptuous nude oil on the wall to Bess Allen's unconscious form, almost at his feet. Hallett's head lifted at a sound that could have been a door slamming shut at the back of the house. There was no time to investigate.

There was a round, black hole just above Rizzio's left eyebrow. Clutched in Bess Allen's fingers was a small .32 caliber automatic that could have drilled that hole in Rizzio's temple. There was a small gash and a widening bruise on Bess's temple. Hallett's eyes whipped to the edge of the table. Cold fingers of fear plucked at his spine, making it quiver like a banjo string.

He could see the case Dave Temple would make of this set-up. Bess Allen, infuriated at her brother's plight, had come out to plead with Rizzio. Salvy had a reputation as a wolf. He had been advancing from his desk toward her when she fired the gun. Then she had fainted and hit her head against the edge of the table. Hallett almost had to believe the evidence his eyes showed him.

THE blonde girl was stirring now. He knelt beside her, lifted her head. Her eyes opened. She stared blankly at Neil Hallett, then buried her face against his chest. "Neil! Neil—it was horrible—"

He patted her shoulder clumsily, talked to her in a low, steady voice.

"Tell me what happened, Bess. We've got to get out of here fast."

He helped her to her feet. She turned her head, threw a quick glance over her shoulder as if to make sure it wasn't an

evil dream. Hallett felt her slim body shiver. Then she started talking, in quick, breathless gasps.

"I decided to beg Rizzio to help Bill get free. There seemed no other way. I telephoned. A man answered, asked who it was and what I wanted. I had to tell him; he wouldn't let me speak to Rizzio until I did. Then Rizzio came on the wire. He asked me to come out here. Said I would meet a friend and everything could be straightened out. From the courthouse steps I saw you talking with him this morning. I was sure you would be here."

"I guess I was the friend he meant," Hallett said. "Go ahead, Bess."

"When I got here, I got frightened. I had heard his reputation with women. So I slipped around to the veranda. If he had been alone, I wasn't going in. Rizzio was talking with someone. I couldn't see his visitor. He was out of the angle of vision from the window. Feeling sure it must be you, I slipped through the window. Just as I got inside, Rizzio was standing by the wall; he turned and a gun fired. Then someone who had been flattened along the wall by the window whirled and hit me. I had shut my eyes and screamed as Rizzio started to fall. I never did see the face of the man who hit me. Then—then you came—"

Hallett was groping in his mind for a way to destroy the chain of circumstantial evidence that threatened to send Bess to the electric chair for the murder of Salvy Rizzio. What she had told him, tied in with the slamming door he had heard. It never occurred to him to doubt her story. The murderer had framed her beautifully, even to putting the gun in her hand as she lost consciousness.

"You beat it for home as fast as you can," he said. "I'll make sure there's no trace of your visit."

She shook her head slowly.

"It won't do, Neil. Whoever answered the phone will tell the police I was coming out here. I wouldn't have any alibi and I won't have you tampering with the truth. Let the police accuse me of the murder. I know you can clear me."

"Me," his voice was incredulous. "After the show I put on this morning? You

wouldn't have a chance, Bess. Dave Temple and his staff would make a monkey out of me again. No, honey. I can tell you now—I'll gladly take this rap myself. I'm of no use in the world any longer. I came out here tonight hoping to get into a fight with Rizzio. If he killed me—it would be a small loss."

The firm little jaw took on a stubborn tilt again. She said:

"You're not a coward, Neil. If you tried anything like that—I'd go to the police and say you were trying to shield me. We both believe in honesty and justice. There must be some way that we can trap this murderer. You can convince any jury of my innocence—if you can only find some method of defeating the attempts of these criminals to unnerve you. I know that you love me, even though you have never said so in just those words. Wouldn't that love be enough to overcome the handicap of your battered nerves. You could just concentrate on our love—our happiness—"

HALLETT'S brain was racing. The pistol shot hadn't sent him into the screaming meemies. Perhaps the distance had something to do with it. Suddenly he got excited.

"Bess," he cried. "There's a chance but it's a dangerous gamble. It might mean that you would be arrested for murder and confined in a cell until your trial. There's no bail for murder suspects, you know. But it might be the means of breaking up this sinister ring of wolves."

"I'll probably be arrested anyway," she said bravely. "After all—there's just Bill and me now—and you—to care what happens to me. Tell me what you want me to do."

"Nothing. Just go home. If the police do pick up your trail, tell them just what happened, forgetting my part in it. I'm not trying to evade anything. But if the police knew I was here, I would be held as a material witness, and wouldn't be allowed to defend you. You can say you regained consciousness and went home. If you're arrested, just say that I'm to defend you. And don't get worried if I disappear for a few days at a time. I'll be working for you."

Evidently Rizzio had expected a social evening with Hallett and Bess. Not a servant had shown up because of the gun shot. Neil walked over to the other arc of the curving drive where Bess had parked her car. A brave smile that belied the pallor in her cheeks was her only answer when Hallett told her to put her faith in him. The gaunt young lawyer seemed to have been reborn under the stress of excitement. His slim figure was alive, his dark eyes blazed with confidence. She gulped, nodded, then stepped on the starter.

Hallett resisted the temptation to wipe the gun clean. He couldn't afford to jeopardize Bess further by tampering with evidence, even if it never could be proved against him. He went over the room carefully; spent fifteen minutes going through Rizzio's desk. Once he thought he heard a noise outside the veranda, but a stealthy inspection convinced him it was his nerves.

There was little in the desk to help him. Rizzio was careful to keep only the correspondence and accounts of his semi-legitimate trucking business there. Hallett stood by the desk, tried to reenact the scene of the murder. Bess had said Rizzio turned away from the wall just before he was shot.

Hallett walked over, lifted the oil painting. Disappointment showed in his gaunt face as he found only the paneled wall beneath it. Then his sharp eyes started tracing the contours of the paneling. He found a bit of the border of a panel that seemed infinitesimally higher than the rest. He pushed, pulled and finally began sliding his fingers up and down the border. Somewhere his probing fingers found the spring release. The panel slid back, showing the wall safe.

Hallett smiled grimly. He pressed the moulding again, slid the panel back. Then he whipped across the veranda, and faded into the darkness beyond the shrubs.

HE HAD to walk half a mile before he could flag a taxi. He told the driver to take him to the east side. Hallett paid the meter in front of a frowzy bar, mostly patronized by small time crooks, touts, and bookmakers.

Luck was with him, for his dark eyes

picked up a non-descript little man lolling over a glass of beer at the lower end of the bar. The little man's pinched face showed alarm as Hallett nodded to him to join him in one of the booths. When the waiter had taken an order for two more beers, Hallett said:

"Scumpy, I saved you from the electric chair two years ago on the killing of the guard at the Hybrow Mercantile. Remember?"

"Sure, Mister Hallett. But I didn't gun that guy. You know that. I wasn't even in on that safe cracking job."

"You couldn't afford a lawyer. I thought you were innocent and I defended you for free. Now I want to get paid," Hallett said grimly.

"Hell! I'm flatter than a flounder," Scumpy Davis whined. His little eyes brightened. "Maybe on my next job, I can—"

"You can make your next job pay me, all right, Scumpy," Neil said flatly. "Come on. We're pulling it right now."

Scumpy started to protest. The young lawyer said: "Murder is never outlawed. I could go before the court and swear your alibi was faked."

"But it wasn't!" Scumpy protested.

"The court don't know that—and Jeff Slyke is dead. He was your alibi. It would be just my word against yours. If you don't play along, I'll frame you, Scumpy, sure as hell."

The little safe cracker nodded. Half an hour later Hallett and Scumpy were headed for Rizzio's in Neil's car. He drove past the house, parked in a dark side road. He breathed a sigh of relief as he saw the wing still lighted. There were no moving shadows beyond the French window. Salvy Rizzio's murder was still undiscovered.

The little safe cracker nearly passed out when his frightened eyes saw Rizzio's body. He croaked: "Dead, Mr. Hallett! Did you knock him off?"

"Hell, no. But there's some stuff in the wall safe beneath that picture that may tell me who did. I want it—but fast."

Scumpy knew his business. In fifteen minutes his keen-bitted drill had destroyed the combination and dropped the tumbler

of the safe. Hallett's eyes sparkled as he whipped sheafs of papers and two little books from the safe, deposited them in the briefcase he had brought. Within a half hour, they were in his car tooling back to the east side. From a drug store, he called the police, told them Salvy Rizzio had been murdered. Then he hung up.

Neil Hallett was an elusive person in the days that followed. Bess Allen was arrested on a murder charge. Neil Hallett appeared as her attorney, asked for an immediate hearing. The grand jury indicted the blonde girl and her trial was set. Judge Henry Rand was to sit in the case. Valley City was agog. With the elimination of Rizzio, the trades-people began to find their courage again. Efforts of Rizzio's lieutenants to whip the sheep back to the fold were unsuccessful. Racketeer rule began to totter.

Hallett spent very little time in visiting his client. On his first visit he had told her why he wouldn't. Bess understood and she retold and retold her story for the state's attorneys and the press. Dave Temple was prosecuting. He tried every possible means to get her to plead self-defense, but Bess stubbornly stuck by her guns.

TWO weeks before the date of the trial, Hallett took the train to Capitol City. He carried the briefcase he had filled the night he had *Scrumpy* burgle Rizzio's safe, a crime which the police had been unable to account for or to tie in with the murder.

It was late evening when he returned. Few of the loiterers at the Valley City station noticed the quietly dressed, inconspicuous men who got off the train with Hallett. These quiet men were busy for the next few days, visiting groceries, filling stations, meat markets, and various contractors. On each visit they flashed the identification cards of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. When they left, they cautioned the harassed dealers to keep silent about their visit.

Hallett traveled to the nearest metropolitan city on many nights during the weeks that elapsed between Bess Allen's arrest and the date of her trial. So many trips were made that the station agent

kidded him about earning a commutation rate. The grim-faced attorney smiled and said nothing.

BESS ALLEN'S trial opened with a fanfare of publicity. Every paper in the state had reporters there and both national wire services were represented.

Dave Temple was in his glory before an audience like that. In tones that ran the whole gamut of emotions, he promised the jury to prove that Elizabeth Allen had made an appointment with Salvatore Rizzio; had gone there armed to force him to free her brother on perjured evidence and that when Rizzio had tried to wrest the gun from her, she had murdered him, then fled the scene of the crime. He embellished each step and his face, when he returned to his table, gloatingly defied Neil Hallett to disprove a single fact.

Hallett appeared singularly disinterested. He seemed scarcely to be aware of Temple's gruesome charge. He told the jury simply that Bess Allen hadn't murdered Rizzio and that he would prove that fact to their complete satisfaction.

The defense attorney's studied calm continued as Temple called the state's witnesses to the stand, began to weave the story of Bess's concern over her brother's arrest, of Hallett's unsuccessful effort to clear Bill Allen of the charge of *dealing in counterfeit gas coupons*. Temple put Nicky Palatin on the stand. Palatin served as Rizzio's butler and handyman. Nicky swore he'd gotten Bess's telephone call, and that his boss told him and the housekeeper to take the night off because he had a date with the Allen frail.

Temple seemed surprised when Hallett declined to cross-examine any of his witnesses. The frown deepened on the district attorney's brow when the state finished its case and Hallett said the accused was the only witness he wanted to call.

When Bess was seated in the witness box, Hallett asked quietly:

"When you arrived at Rizzio's house was there anyone with him?"

"Yes. He was talking with someone in the room."

"Did this alarm you?" Hallett asked.

"On the contrary, it reassured me. Mr. Rizzio had told me a friend of mine would be there also for the discussion of my brother's innocence."

Temple leaped to his feet.

"I object. Bill Allen's guilt or innocence hasn't been established."

Judge Rand pounded on the desk sharply. Hallett turned around, blinked mildly, stared at the judge. Both Judge Rand and Temple seemed amazed. Only a month before, the rap of that gavel had made a driveling, shaking wreck out of Neil Hallett. Now the young attorney only bowed, smiled gravely as Judge Rand said: "Objection sustained."

"You thought the other visitor would be me, didn't you, Miss Allen."

Hallett turned to face Temple as the district attorney leaped to his feet with another objection.

"You see, Mr. District Attorney, I did have an engagement with Rizzio that night. I am the only friend Miss Allen has who would be interested in talking with Rizzio."

Clamor arose in the courtroom. Hallett was steady as a rock as Judge Rand pounded and Temple yelled objections. When the din had finally quieted, Hallett walked over to the table before the judge's bench. He picked up the small caliber gun the ballistics experts had tabbed as the murder gun. He showed it to Bess Allen.

"Isn't it a fact that a gun was fired just as you stepped into the room? And that almost immediately afterward you were struck across the temple with some blunt object—say, for example, the barrel of this gun—and knocked unconscious? And when you regained consciousness, you found the gun had been forced into your hand and your fingers wrapped around it?"

Temple leaped out of his chair. His face was purple with anger. He snatched the gun from Hallett's hand. Judge Rand's gavel sounded like a machine-gun at the breach of court etiquette. Neither Temple nor Hallett appeared to hear him.

The district attorney waved the gun in front of Bess Allen.

"Isn't it really the fact that you took this gun from your handbag, and pointed it at Salvatore Rizzio, and then pulled the trig-

ger—just like this?" the district attorney screamed.

Hallett jerked his head aside. The gun should be empty—but Temple was like an insane fool waving it around. Or was he an insane fool.

THE sudden crack of the small automatic threw the court in an uproar. The gun had exploded, only a few inches from Neil Hallett's ear. For a long second after the roar had been beaten down by Judge Rand's gavel, Temple stood stupefied, staring at the gun and at Hallett, and then at Judge Rand.

Color had drained from Hallett's cheeks. He gripped the rail of the witness box. Bess Allen was half out of her chair. Her voice was sharp as she cried: "Steady, Neil. Steady now, darling—" His dark eyes were riveted on her face. Then he stiffened, a slow, tight smile split his dark countenance as he followed the district attorney over to the judge's bench.

"Your Honor, I apologize most humbly—I hadn't the faintest idea it was loaded—" Temple was at a loss for words.

Judge Rand's gavel rose and fell.

"I call it a mistrial," he shouted. "I won't have such actions in my court—"

Neil Hallett held up a thin hand.

"There'll be another trial, Judge. But there'll be another prisoner, also. You see—the clever little plan you and your stooge Temple worked out to throw me if the going got tough, didn't work this time. I didn't get shell-shocked—but you will—when you see the evidence my friends from the F. B. I. have picked up from Rizzio's wall safe; from his gangsters who are ready to burn you for Salvy's murder if the State doesn't, and from the poor dopes whom your mob had intimidated into paying extortion money and into dealing in black market products."

Judge Rand was speechless as the two inconspicuous men left their seats, marched toward the bench. One had a briefcase. The other carried a .45 automatic negligently at his thigh. From the back of the courtroom, four more quiet, alert men came forward. They carried short, automatic shot-guns, in the event the gangsters decided to stick by their master mind.

"You made a mistake telling me you would be broke when you were dropped from the bench, Judge Rand. Just as Rizzio made a mistake when he told both me and you that he was going to take over the mob himself. The same fear of poverty that led you to plan this scheme for amassing a quick fortune to retire on, impelled you to murder Rizzio so that fortune wouldn't be threatened. You figured you could appoint a new front man from the gang and carry on as before. But Salvy didn't trust you. A man who was a traitor to the law he was supposed to uphold would be a traitor to the mob he led. Salvy had it all down in black and white in his secret safe. The G-men have those records now, including a statement signed by Rizzio, saying that if he was ever murdered—you would be his murderer."

RAND'S face was green now. He opened his mouth, tried to speak. No words came. Suddenly he reached out, grabbed up the tiny gun that Temple had laid on his bench. Before the G-men could grab him,

he had lifted the muzzle, pressed it against his temple and pulled the trigger. His body slumped across the bench.

When the chaos had quieted, Bess Allen was out of the witness box, where she had been a startled witness to the drama. The blonde girl rushed across the dias, threw her arms around Neil Hallett. She cried:

"You did it, Neil! You did it! I don't know how you managed, with that horrible judge trying to shatter your nerves and his tool Temple firing that gun right beside your ear. How did you do it?"

"Very simply, darling," Hallett smiled. "I just swapped an eye for an ear." He reached up, took a diver's plug out of each ear. "I remember I'd learned lip reading pretty well in the hospital. If I couldn't hear noises they couldn't startle me. I've spent most every night in the past month down at Centralia, perfecting my lip reading. I haven't heard a sound since the trial started, but I've known everything that went on. So instead of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, it's been an eye for an ear and both eyes for the truth."

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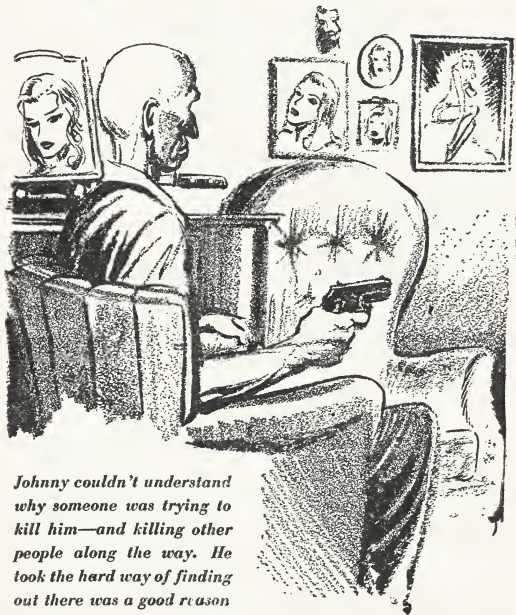
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There Shall Be No Morning



Johnny couldn't understand why someone was trying to kill him—and killing other people along the way. He took the hard way of finding out there was a good reason

"Hold it," Johnny said softly. "Who did this to you?"

STARLIGHT
DEEGAN

CLUB
GAL

A NOVELETTE

By
**EDWARD
RONNS**



JOHNNY CANNON moistened his lips. He was aware as he did so that the habit was not like him; but his mouth felt dry and he had to keep his hands folded one on the other to hide their trembling.

He chose his words carefully. "Each time it was worse. Each time it came closer to success. Afterward, in my own mind, it became quite obvious. These weren't accidents. Somebody is trying to kill me."

Lieutenant Kisiday wriggled lower in his swivel chair. His back was to the window, and Cannon knew that the hard evening sunlight was arranged deliberately to keep him in its brightness and the cop in shadow. He felt momentarily like a fumbling, neurotic fool.

"Go on, Mr. Cannon." Kisiday's voice was that of a man who has spent his years in tactful relations with a troubled public. He was squat and solid, like an egg, with a reddish face and a neatly trimmed white mustache. His eyes were sympathetic. "You said a cornice fell and almost hit you. That was last Tuesday?"

Johnny Cannon nodded. "First the cornice, then the gas, then the automobile, the shot, and finally the telephone call." He

was a man close to thirty, with a sensitive face contrasted by powerful shoulders in his conservative brown pinstripe. His gray eyes were troubled. "The falling cornice seemed like one of those accidents—it happened late at night, as I was passing the Tri-State Building. The stone missed me by inches, but other than reporting it to the building manager, I thought no more about it."

Kisiday made a note on the green blotter and nodded.

"Then there was the gas that almost killed me," Cannon went on. "Somebody got into the apartment while I was sleeping and turned on the kitchen stove. I'd have suffocated if it wasn't for Freddie."

"Who is Freddie?"

"The man who shares my apartment—Fred Naylor. We're both engineers at the L. E. Plant—but he works nights. He came in that morning, smelled gas, and dragged me out of there."

"Was this reported to the police?" Kisiday asked.

"I was unconscious. A police respirator brought me around. I missed work that day."

Kisiday made another hen track across the green blotter. Cannon swallowed drily. Recounting it brought back all the terror of this morning. He waited a moment, then went on:

"There was an auto crash—this car came downhill with the motor off, and made no sound. It almost got me as I crossed the street coming home. That was two days ago. Nobody was in the car. Apparently it had slipped its brake. It crashed through the window of a delicatessen store at Second and Pine."

More scrawls went on the blotter.

"Then," Cannon said, "yesterday somebody shot at me through my apartment window." Kisiday looked suddenly alert and Cannon rolled up his sleeve to exhibit a bandaged arm. "The bullet burned across the skin and plunked into the wall. I was more shocked than hurt."

"Did you report it?"

"I—no."

Kisiday's eyes were screened behind lowered lids. His mouth drooped at the corners.

"What about this telephone call?"

"That was this morning. It woke me up, and when I answered a man's voice just chuckled and asked me how I liked to see the sun come up at dawn." He paused and swallowed again. "Then he went on and said, 'There won't be any more mornings for you, Mr. Cannon. No more mornings at all.'"

"You're sure it was a man's voice?"

"Yes. But it was muffled. I didn't recognize it. I don't know anyone in New York, anyway."

"Then you don't think this all might be a gag?"

CANNON lifted his wounded arm. "The shot wasn't intended to be funny. It was meant to kill me."

"You're sure this telephone voice meant to talk to you, and not to your roommate?"

"He called me by name."

"You don't know who it could be?"

"No."

"Nor why?"

"No. The man on the telephone was a complete surprise. Believe me, it's a terrible, sickening feeling. My life has never been threatened before. I'm not a coward, but it's the not knowing *who* or *why* that's getting me. So I came to you today, straight from work."

Kisiday studied Cannon's brown, ascetic face. He made a dissatisfied sound and sat up straighter.

It can't be mistaken identity, since he mentioned you by name on the telephone. How about special enemies?"

"Absolutely not." Cannon was emphatic. "I've just come from Denver, two weeks ago. On the twelfth, to be exact, to work for the L. E. people. I know absolutely nobody here in town except Fred Naylor, my roommate—and I've only known him since I came here. The government sent me here, so nobody could know I was coming. Naylor was good enough to share his apartment when I couldn't find a place of my own. And it's not a gag. I've thought it all over. I even thought of such melodramatic things as an unknown inheritance—" he smiled apologetically. "You know, someone wanting me out of the way for money I know

nothing about. But there isn't a soul in the world who would fit that category."

"How about your work? Is there any special knowledge you have that someone might want?"

Cannon grinned. "No, nothing like that. There must be two dozen men doing the same type of work. It's not a secret weapon, I assure you."

Kisiday looked at his watch. "It's now seven in the evening. Sunrise is about five. Would you want a bodyguard for the next ten hours?"

"Would it do any good?"

"It's dubious," Kisiday shrugged. "It's too easy to kill a man in the city, if the killer is really determined. We'd get him afterward, but that wouldn't do you much good. The only thing is to nab the killer before he kills you." The cop worried his underlip. Would you care to be locked up for the night? You would be safe in a cell."

Cannon looked embarrassed.

No. I—I don't like to be shut up. I have a mild case of claustrophobia. I get ill when I'm in a locked room and have no space around me, or can't get out. I—I'd rather take my chances on the outside."

Kisiday made a decision.

"Okay, Mr. Cannon. I'll turn you over to Eddie Pratt. He's a department character, but don't mind his ways. He's the best man for you." He pressed a button. "Eddie will get you through until morning."

Sergeant Pratt was a tall, lanky man in a dilapidated topcoat, a long face and heavily-lidded eyes that made him look perpetually sleepy. His mouth was wide, thin and tight. He nodded casually to Cannon and listened as Kisiday outlined his job in terse sentences. After the first few words he never took his eyes off Cannon's face.

He said: "Well, it's a lot easier, since the mysterious guy puts himself behind the eight ball by setting a time limit on it. All we've got to worry about is the next ten hours. I guess we'll manage."

Listening to him, Cannon felt the lifting of a great weight from his mind. Pratt went on, addressing him: "You maybe won't see me, Mr. Cannon, but don't worry—I'll be right on hand. I guess nothing much will happen to you."

Cannon thanked him, and after a few more moments, went out.

Dusk was just falling. . . .

HIS apartment was on a residential street, on the fourth floor of a Victorian red brick house that still had cast iron shoe scrapers set in the pavement beside the white stone steps. There were rubber plants in the lower windows. The tiny lobby was painted ivory, and the miniature elevator was automatic. Cannon rode up with his hands deep in his pockets, a frown incised between his gray eyes.

He wasn't sure whether he was still afraid or not. He hadn't seen Sergeant Pratt since leaving Headquarters, and he had avoided the first cab that swerved in toward him, walking two extra blocks to pick up a hackney at a regular stand. The lighted city street looked normal. On the sidewalk he had paused, looking for the tall thin Pratt, but there was no one in sight.

Walking down the little hallway to the apartment he shared with Fred Naylor, he took his keys from his pocket and studied his long fingers. They were trembling slightly. He had a momentary spasm in the pit of his stomach as he stared at the blank, locked door, wondering whether anyone waited for him behind it. Then, shrugging in irritation, he snicked the lock aside and went in.

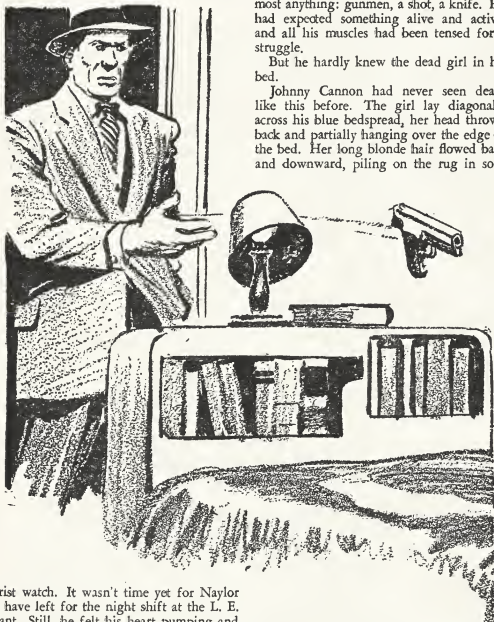
He breathed a little sigh of relief as he got the light on. The living room was normal—and empty. The heap of ashes, gray in the Vermont marble fireplace, with the faded carpet and heavy leather divan were all in order.

He pulled down the window blind as a precaution against the unknown rifleman who had singed his arm. There was still a neat round hole in the pane and a corresponding scar in the opposite wall where the slug was still embedded.

The back door in the kitchen was secure. He checked the little gas stove with a wry grimace; it hadn't been tampered with. Then, halfway across the living room to the back, he stopped stone dead.

"Fred?" he called.

There was no answer. He glanced at his



most anything: gunmen, a shot, a knife. He had expected something alive and active, and all his muscles had been tensed for a struggle.

But he hardly knew the dead girl in his bed.

Johnny Cannon had never seen death like this before. The girl lay diagonally across his blue bedspread, her head thrown back and partially hanging over the edge of the bed. Her long blonde hair flowed back and downward, piling on the rug in soft,

wrist watch. It wasn't time yet for Naylor to have left for the night shift at the L. E. plant. Still, he felt his heart pumping and his breath sliding fast between parted lips. He straightened inwardly with a snap.

"Fred, is that you?" he called again.

He went into the bedroom and snapped on the light.

It was as if someone had kicked him and left him numb and gasping for breath. He couldn't move. Terror kept his eyes pinned on what he saw, raising the short hair on the nape of his neck. He had expected al-

thick waves. One arm of her flowered, quilted robe was torn wide open, revealing white skin furrowed by ugly red gashes.

She had been strangled to death. There was no mistaking the color of her face, her wild, staring eyes, and the open, purplish mouth.

Her name, so far as Johnny Cannon knew, was Georgia Smith, and she had moved into the next apartment the week

"See if this is yours,"
said the man. And Johnny
caught the gun.



before. He had never spoken to her.

Still, here she was, dead.

His first coherent thought was of Lieutenant Kisiday. He knew the police would have to be informed. He dried his hands on his thighs, staring at the dead girl. There wasn't a sound except the far-away whirring of the electric alarm clock on the table between the beds. He half turned, intending to reach the telephone in the foyer—

And then he saw the big man standing there.

HIS face was a criss-cross of fine scars, and his hair was cut to a quarter-inch of his hard, ridged scalp. His plaid suit would have gone well on Lenox Avenue. But for all his huge size, he was tense and alert; caution glistened in his little eyes.

"Don't move, Cannon. Keep it exactly like that."

Johnny didn't move. It wasn't the size of the man that held him. For all the muscle the hulk obviously possessed, he could have been taken—but not with that gun in his hand. It was a heavy Colt's .45, and the muzzle drilled steadily at Cannon's stomach.

He found his voice. "Nice of you to drop in."

The big man bared a toothy grin. "For your information, call me Irwin. I guess you seen the little lady on your bed?"

"Yes, I saw her," Cannon admitted. "Did you do it?"

"That's a laugh. You ain't even surprised, are you?"

"Should I be?"

"You're a tough nut, all right. Just like they said."

"Just like who said?"

Admiration shone in the big man's eyes. "You and me both know who fixed little Georgie. And you ain't even surprised. It ain't every day a guy finds a dead dame in his bunk. So you did it, chum."

Cannon said suddenly: "I'll call the police now, if you don't mind."

"But I do mind," Irwin said. His eyes and mouth were ugly. "Georgie was a good kid."

"Hell," Cannon snapped, "I didn't kill her. I didn't even know her."

"And maybe this gun ain't yours? Irwin

sneered. Astonishingly, he tossed the heavy .45 toward Cannon.

Johnny caught the automatic instinctively, flipped the barrel around, and felt the heavy grip slap satisfyingly into his palm.

"Let me at that phone," he rapped.

Irwin looked disgusted. "The rod ain't loaded. See?" The big man advanced and with infinite care, plucked the gun by its muzzle from Cannon's surprised hand. "In case you don't know it, Georgie wasn't just throttled, chum. She was shot. You can't see the bullet hole from here, but this is the gun that did it." Very carefully he wrapped the ugly weapon in a handkerchief and dropped it in his pocket. Cannon started forward angrily, then checked himself as the big man withdrew his hand, this time holding a short, snubby .38.

"Hold it," he grinned. "This one *is* loaded." He patted his pocket containing the Colt. "I thank you very much. You are now it, sucker. And I *don't* think you're going to see tomorrow morning."

He backed toward the door, carefully unhooked the latch, and heeled the door open. He was gone in a moment.

CHAPTER II

Killer's Widow?



HIS belly gun in the big man's hand prevented any senseless chase. Cannon stared at the closed door for a long moment, his hands clenched tight at his sides. His thoughts were clear

and angry. Obviously Irwin knew about threats against him, to judge from his last remark. Just as obviously, he was being framed for the death of Georgie Smith. That was the reason why Irwin had allowed him to handle the Colt.

The insolence of it began a slow, smouldering anger in Cannon. He resented being pushed around by Irwin. Up to now the menace had been unknown and the threats made by a shadowy, intangible personality. But Irwin was all too tangible. And the crudity of it made Cannon swear softly with suddenly and irritated rage.

His glance settled on yesterday's bullet hole in the wall, where the slug has been

imbedded after missing him. Abruptly he turned and stared at the holed window pane. The next moment he had pencil, paper and protractor from his drafting equipment. He measured the height of the bullet hole and made rapid calculations, then went back to the window.

The bullet had entered in an almost level line of flight. There was only one building visible from which the shot could have been fired—the Tri-State Building.

Cannon's whole figure became suddenly alert. His eyes were excited. The Tri-State was where the cornice had fallen and almost killed him!

He attacked his figures and sights with new energy now. He almost, but not quite, forgot the body of the murdered girl in the next room.

It was ten minutes later, at eight o'clock, when a key rattled in the hall door and Freddie Naylor came in. Cannon's roommate was ten years his senior. He was short and stout, with small intelligent eyes, a ruddy face, and a tendency to gossip and pry into personal matters that Cannon found only mildly annoying. His clothes invariably fitted him with all the grace of a potato sack.

Cannon hastily barred his way to the bedroom.

"I thought you were on your way to the plant."

"Heck, no, I'm not due on until nine tonight. Is there anything new on that mysterious bird who's after you, Johnny?"

"Something, maybe." Cannon described Sergeant Pratt. "Did you see the guy hanging around outside?"

"Nope. What are you hiding in the bedroom?"

"A surprise package," Cannon said grimly. "Count ten before you open the door after I leave."

"Is something cooking, Johnny?" Naylor's eyes were bright with his inveterate curiosity. "Have you got a lead on the guy who's after you?"

"I sure have," Cannon said. He reached for his hat and coat and said bluntly: "When you call the cops, ask for Lieutenant Kisiday. You might tell him that I didn't do it."

"Huh? What's that?"

But Cannon was already gone.

HE FELT better now. The shadows were coming out of their corners and growing more tangible. But caution advised the rear entrance to the apartment house, and he made his way to the Tri-State Building by a devious route of small alleys and courtyards. It took fifteen minutes to negotiate the three city blocks, but when he reached the wide arcade that bisected the building he was sure he wasn't followed. He waited, studying the busy street, but there was no familiar faces.

There was a floor plan framed under glass on the marble wall, and Cannon studied this before going up to the manager's office. The superintendent knew him well, recalling the cornice incident. He was a mild little man named Hartley, and he was distressingly eager to please.

His first apprehension at sight of Cannon, considering the damages Cannon had neglected to sue for, changed to vast relief.

"Oh, that!" the little man said. "Why, certainly, sir! Certainly!"

"It's Suite 405," Cannon repeated. "Won't the tenants mind?"

The little man said: "Hee-hee. There are no tenants, Mr. Cannon. That office has been empty quite a while. I'm certainly glad you're such a fine, level-headed young man, sir. An accident is an act of God, I always say. No man can prevent that sort of thing. But it was most distressing."

"Let's go up to 405," Cannon said.

There was nothing unusual or sinister about the suite. He followed Hartley through a small anteroom separated from the main office by a dusty walnut rail. The larger room was furnished with two desks, a floor lamp, an orange straw carpet, and an empty wastebasket. There was dust everywhere, and the thin gray film was nowhere disturbed.

"Has anyone been in lately?" he demanded.

"Oh, no, sir. This hasn't been occupied for two months."

"Have any prospective tenants inspected these rooms recently? Say, two days ago?"

Hartley thought about this, then shook his

head. "No one at all. Are you interested in moving in, sir? I think, in view of your very generous attitude, we might make some very economical arrangement—"

Cannon's eyes were dissatisfied.

"Turn off the light," he said.

"Eh?"

"The light. I want to look outside."

With the office in darkness he could see the city lights twinkling beyond the dark window-pane. His apartment, a quarter of a mile away, was easily identified. Lights were on in all the rooms, and he could make out three or four men moving around. Their figures were clear, good targets. Evidently the cops had found Miss Smith's body, and he had a twinge of sympathy for Fred Naylor. He grinned wryly, then noticed Hartley fidgeting nervously beside him.

"It's very curious you should pick this window, sir. I do hope you haven't changed your mind about pressing suit against the Tri-State. Our investigation up here proved it was totally unavoidable. An act of God."

"You investigated this office?" Cannon asked.

Hartley looked confused. "Why, yes. The cornice fell from this ledge just outside the window. We've had a steeplejack working here, pointing up the cement. Would you care to look?"

Cannon was interested. "Certainly."

The heavy window wasn't locked. He leaned out, then felt the roughness of a splinter under his palm. The wood had been gouged recently by something hard and metallic. By the barrel of a rifle, he thought. He was aware of great excitement seething inside him. A few of the pieces began to fit together in his mind.

Scaffolding ran just outside the window, along a two-foot ledge. There was a gap like a broken tooth where the ton block of concrete had dropped to the street four floors below and almost crushed him. The wooden planks spanned the gap and angled around the corner.

Cannon turned back to the little superintendent.

"How many men have been working on this job?"

Hartley's eyes glistened in the yellow electric light.

"Just one, so far. We questioned him very thoroughly."

"What's his name?" Cannon rapped.

"He's a Hungarian—Bronislaus Korony. A very odd character. He's an old circus performer—formerly known as the Fly. He used to do tightrope walking and that sort of thing." Hartley's face was freezing fast. "You don't think the stone was dropped deliberately, do you? Do you know the man?"

"No, but I'd like to."

Hartley's mouth tightened. "If you are investigating this incident with a view to bringing suit, then I'm afraid I can't help you further. The police have all the data on the case, Mr. Cannon."

"I'd like this Korony fellow's address."

"I can't help you, Mr. Cannon."

"I assure you I'm not planning to sue over the accident—"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Cannon. If the manager knew I'd told you as much as I have, it would cost me my job. Unless you are interested in renting the office, I'm afraid I shall have to bid you good-night."

There was nothing more to be gained. Cannon followed the little man down to the main floor and reached the street by the arcade a moment later.

CHAPTER III

No Jail Today



THE corner drug store he leafed through the telephone book, searching for Korony's address. It was not a usual name. He jotted the street number down and went out.

The passerby paid no attention to him. A neon clock over a jeweler's read nine-thirty. He took a subway for two stops before getting off at a hack stand and taking a cab.

Number 321 Spring Street was an unpainted gray cottage at the end of a bleak and dismal little street. A concrete safety wall made the place a dead end. Cannon left his cab at the corner and walked down the uneven brick sidewalk to the waist-high wall and leaned over. A muddy embankment dropped precipitously down to a river of rails. Green and amber signal lights shimmered on the steel tracks. Around the curve

a switch engine hooted and chugged, and the air smelled of coal gas from passing locomotives.

He turned toward the house. There were no lights inside. The wan moonlight reflected blank green shades behind the windows. There was a sagging porch and a few rockers. The little yard in front was rock and dirt, with a scattering of broken bottles. Over all lay a thick coat of coal dust.

He wished he had a gun, and almost hoped the house was empty and that his search for the Fly would be delayed until morning—if there was a morning for him. The last thought decided him, and he went up the creaking front porch and rang the bell.

It pealed emptily through the little gray house. He tried again, but only a locomotive's whistle answered him. The door latch was loose under his thumb when he tried it. He prodded with his knee and the door swung in with a faint squeal.

She asked, frightened, "Did you do anything to him?" And Johnny said, "Somebody beat me to it. He's dead."



The front hall smelled of stale cooking. Cannon waited a moment. There was no sound anywhere in the darkness. The rug underfoot felt thin. He went a few cautious steps into the living room, found it empty except for pathetic furniture, and went on, guided by the dim moonlight. The kitchen, surprisingly enough, was immaculate. On the little table lay an envelope, addressed to Korony. It was a letter from a construction company offering the Fly a job on bridge work.

Cannon went softly down the hall and up the worn steps to the second floor. The muffled sound of the freight yards was distant and subdued, cushioned in the gray silence of the house. There were two bedrooms up here. One was empty except for a work bench and a clutter of carpenter's tools. The bath was empty, too.

The front room was a surprise. It was different from the squalor in the rest of the house. Cannon stood frozen in the doorway. He could do nothing but stare for a moment, his face and scalp tightening.

There was a soft chenille rug on the ivory-painted floor, a dresser of gray English hawwood, and a bed to match. The bedspread was chenille to go with the rug, and a pair of heavy blue silk pajamas were neatly folded across the foot of the bed. But it was the pictures on the wall that startled him. They were all of the same girl, large and small, from tiny tintypes to a huge night-club poster advertising Starlight Deegan in the Club Madrigal. The photographs covered every available inch of wall space.

It took just a moment for Cannon to sweep all this in. Then a sound from the mohair bucket chair across the room jerked his attention to the Fly. It was a little sound, the faintest of sighs, like a man's last breath.

THE man sat very straight, his back tightly arched against the pressure of the long knife that was thrust through his neck. Part of the visible blade, near the hilt, winked at Cannon in the dim light. There was a lot of blood on his T-shirt. He was long and very thin, with a gaunt face and completely bald. His eyes were ghastly in the moonlight. He stared unwinkingly at Cannon, and in his right hand, the forearm resting on the chair,

was an ugly, snouted gun. The gun was pointed squarely at Cannon's middle.

Johnny breathed between tight, dry lips. "Hold it," he said softly. "Hold it, please."

Korony's eyelids flickered. His whole body seemed as tight as a spring. Cannon was fascinated by the knife.

"Who did this to you?" he asked.

The Fly's lips moved stiffly. "I did it shaving." His chest moved ever so slightly, and his voice was barely audible. "Don't call the cops. A styptic pencil won't help me now."

Cannon said: "You still need a doctor." He started toward the man in the chair, but the gun jerked up a little.

"Stay right there. Who are you?"

"Cannon, John Cannon."

The man's mouth twisted. "I mighta known, I—" He winced, jerked his body still tighter in that tortured arch. His breath bubbled loudly and blood dribbled from a corner of his lips. "You better—you better beat it, dope. You oughtn't to—be here—"

"I'll get the police," Cannon said. He was aware of sweat on his hands. "You need help."

"I'm done for. But you could—you tell Starlight—"

"This girl?" Cannon asked, nodding to the array of pictures.

"My girl," the Fly whispered. "My girl. She—"

He was dead, just as suddenly as that. The gun fell from nerveless fingers, hitting the floor with a thump. As if a band had broken, the Fly's rigid position snapped, loosening all at once. His body folded forward and tumbled out of the mohair bucket chair, hitting the chenille carpet with a series of dull bumps. He sprawled at Cannon's feet.

THERE was a telephone in the hall downstairs that Cannon remembered seeing. He went down the rattling steps fast, with knees that trembled.

The phone was in a little alcove under the stairs, just this side of the kitchen doorway. Some inner instinct made him pause as he reached it and turn abruptly toward the dark kitchen door.

The move saved his life. Out of the darkness came a swift, glittering twinkle of a knife blade, arcing end over end. It hissed past his ear and thumped viciously into the stair panel.

Cannon whirled toward the kitchen doorway. The man was just a shadow in the dimness. Something slammed hard across the side of Cannon's head and he went sidewise. Only the wall saved him from losing his footing. He recovered in time to grapple with the man. He couldn't see the other's face beyond a swift white blur and glisten of eyes. He lashed out desperately, felt his fist sink into solid flesh. The man grunted and faded back and Cannon followed through, his fists pounding like pistons into the man's middle. He worked him through the doorway into the dark kitchen—and he never knew what happened afterward.

Later he remembered something dark flashing in the man's hand, and a stunning pain across his head, followed by a whirling typhoon of jagged sparks that danced before his eyes. His grip on the killer loosened. He never remembered hitting the floor flat on his face.

His first thought on coming to was the time. His watch was still going. It was after ten o'clock. He was still on the floor of the cottage hallway, wrapped in silent darkness. He felt very much alone.

Anger made him sit up, despite the nauseating pain that swept through his head. There was blood on his scalp, and he dabbed this away while his senses slowly cleared. The anger inside him became a determined urge to fight back.

There was a gun upstairs, the Fly's, and he found it on the floor there. The body of the former circus acrobat lay where it had fallen. The knife still twinkled in his throat. Cannon stared for a moment at the gallery of photographs of Starlight Deegan on the wall. She looked like a nice number. There was something good about her clear, wide eyes. She would be a redhead, Cannon decided.

The whole room gave him the eerie impression of a place of worship, and he wondered just how the Fly was connected with the torch singer. She looked too clean and good for him.

There was a full six rounds in the .32. He checked it, then locked the barrel. The weight of the gun in his hand felt good.

He spent no more time in the little gray cottage by the railroad.

HE NOTICED the black sedan the moment he stepped outside. It was parked against the concrete wall that guarded the freight yards. He couldn't see if anyone was in it. He paused on the little porch, considering his chances. Then, shrugging, he started upstreet, his hand on the belly gun.

The sedan's motor came to life with a snarl. He could hear it rolling after him. He walked for ten more tingling paces, then turned abruptly. The sedan had crept alongside and he could see the driver's face now. It was the cop, Eddie Pratt. Cannon sighed with relief.

"How long have you been around here?" he demanded.

The sergeant's gaunt face was inscrutable. "Not long enough. Hop in. You're a pretty active bird. I've been wanting to talk to you."

Cannon got in the prowler car and relaxed, stretching his long legs. He lit a cigarette, aware that Pratt didn't miss the trembling of his hand.

"I suppose you mean about that girl," Cannon said.

"In a minute. What are you doing around this dump tonight?"

Cannon said: "Just visiting."

"Thought you were a little scared of this mysterious menace of yours."

"I got over being scared," said Cannon.

"How come?"

"I got mad," said Cannon.

Pratt grunted. "Mad enough to knock off Georgie Smith?"

"The girl? No. I didn't do that."

"Well, you knew she was dead, anyway."

"I found her," Cannon admitted. He told the whole story, including Irwin. He dropped it after he left the corpse with Fred Naylor. "I didn't kill her and I don't know why she was killed, either. I have no ideas on it at all, except that they tried to frame me for it."

"You never knew the girl before?"

"No."

Pratt made a sucking sound between his teeth. He drove carelessly, with little attention to traffic, heading back to town.

"Did you know I've been tailing you all night?" he asked.

"I suspected it."

"You tried to shake me off, after leaving the Tri-State Building."

"I thought it might be the guy who wants to kill me."

Pratt said: "Oh, yeah, that." He very plainly didn't believe it.

Cannon said: "I've told you the truth."

"Not all of it. I'd like to ask some questions, Mr. Cannon. Simple questions, and I don't want elaborate answers. Just the truth."

"Sure," Cannon said.

"Did you ever know a man named Red Forester?"

Cannon considered the name, then shook his head. "No."

"Did you ever hear of him before?"

"No."

"Can you remember when you got off the train here at Grand Central? What you did, where you walked, what exit you used at the terminal?"

"Certainly," Cannon said.

"Did anything unusual happen to you there?"

"No. I bought a newspaper in the waiting room, that's all."

"Was the stand crowded?"

"Yes. I had to wait a minute or two."

"What time was it then?"

"About 11:55 in the morning. The train was twenty minutes late and it took five minutes to get my baggage. What's all this about?"

Pratt sighed deeply. "It's just another case I'm working on, besides yours. This Red Forester I asked you about was knocked off Wednesday morning, the day after you got here. He was a phony. Nobody missed him, except me. I wanted to get my hands on him. I did, eventually, but he was dead. Somebody pumped slugs into him and ditched him in Central Park."

"Well, that wasn't my doing," Cannon said, irritated.

"Maybe there's no point to this at all. But I'm betting the same slugs killed Georgie—

the same gun. But you didn't know Red. Nor Georgie."

Cannon said angrily: "No, I didn't. I told you that."

Pratt said: "You and me are going to talk to the lieutenant some more. I'm sorry about your claustrophobia, Mr. Cannon, but I'm taking you in. You see, Georgie came from Denver, your home town. What's more, she had a picture of you in her room, too."

"That's impossible!"

"You wrote, 'With love' on it, too. It's a cell, Mr. Cannon, for you."

IT WAS too much. There was no point protesting that jail would make him deathly ill; he could have stood that. There was no point in arguing that it was *his* life that was threatened, that *he* wasn't a murderer. Nor would Pratt believe that the picture had been stolen or lost three days after he arrived in New York. He had meant to send it home to his married sister, but it had vanished before that.

They were at a busy intersection, waiting for the traffic light to change. There was a theater and a penny arcade and a shooting gallery nearby. There were crowds of people to hide him once he hit the pavement. He made his decision. Taking the snubby .32 from his pocket, he said:

"I like you, Sergeant; but you're all wrong. Let me out here."

Pratt's eyes swung almost lazily to the gun in his hand.

"You keep surprising me all the time, Mr. Cannon."

Cannon elbowed the door open.

"Don't make me plug you," he warned.

"I won't. I've been up against amateurs before. You can beat it anytime. You're too trigger-happy for me, Mr. Cannon."

Johnny slammed the door shut and ran. He dodged among the waiting cars, hit the sidewalk, slammed into a fat woman, spun around the corner. He went through the penny arcade at a fast walk, breathing hard, and out the back exit. The alley led alongside the theater. He edged open one of the fire doors and let himself into the warm, stuffy darkness. Nothing happened. There was no sign of pursuit.

He stood in the aisle for a moment, trembling. The screen was huge, a flickering, distorted image of blacks and whites. After a long while he breathed normally and quietly. He walked up the aisle to the lobby and into the men's room for another ten minutes. Then he went outside. Nobody was waiting for him. He didn't see Pratt. He found a cab and drove off.

Cannon said, "This isn't a stick-up, Hurley. It's worse."



CHAPTER IV

Riot Call



THE Club Madrigal was set far back from the road, under a grove of dark, towering trees. A fountain tinkled in the center of the lawn, and a moat of running water, crossed by a miniature drawbridge, led to the entrance. Dim strains of an accordion drifted on the midnight air.

Cannon allowed a uniformed doorman to welcome him in. There was a short ramp with velvet guide ropes that gave him no alternative but to enter the bar. Flesh-colored spotlights moved very slowly, glinting on pink and green glassware and the barman's white jacket. A blonde dressed in someone's conception of a medieval minnesinger took his hat and topcoat. The costume was imaginative. He followed her figure with speculative eyes and chose a corner table.

The waiter brought him a Canadian Club and he watched the accordionist. The man was decked out as a court jester, with long, belled shoes and a skull cap fitted to a black "V" between his bright dark eyes. He had a heavy layer of powder over jowls that needed a shave. His glance drifted over Cannon, returned to settle on his necktie, then wandered on. The headwaiter was talking to the minnesinger. The music swelled in plaintive wails from the jester's bellows.

After a moment the headwaiter walked through the bar and went by the accordionist to disappear through a back door. Cannon ordered another drink, but didn't touch it. He waited. The musician strolled among the tables as he played. He made one round and stood beside Cannon, playing muted chords with no particular melody. He was perspiring, and there were crooked streaks running through the heavy layer of powder on his jaw. His eyes jerked downward.

"You like it here, Mr. Cannon?"

Cannon was beyond surprise. "I like it fine," he said. "Who is the friend who knows my name?"

"Lots of people know you, Mr. Cannon."

The hands working the accordion were

square, thick and hairy. "We've got a cozy little place here, the Madrigal."

"Sure, I like it," Cannon repeated.

"Yeah. But the boss wishes you would go away. Anywhere else."

"Why?"

The accordionist was sweating heavily.

"He just wishes."

Cannon said: "Send him over and we'll talk it out."

"Uh-uh. He just said to tell you that the party you might want to see don't want to see you."

"And who is that?"

"You tell me," the man suggested.

Cannon said: "I want to see Starlight. That's what I'm here for. I've got some news about the Fly for her."

"Sure. That's what she's afraid of. I don't know what she sees in that guy, not at all."

"You mean Starlight knows me?" Cannon asked.

"I know nothin' about nothin'. Are you leaving us now?"

"After Starlight," Cannon said.

The accordionist sighed. "Such a stubborn guy."

He drifted away.

SHE came in through the back door, beside the bar, and Cannon didn't see her until she slid into the red leather chair across the table from him. She was tall and she was slender, and even under the slow-moving spotlights, she was beautiful. Beautiful in a clean and lovely way. Her amber hair went well with her wide green eyes. Her lips were rich and red and full, but her mouth was set tight at the corners.

Her voice was nice, too. She said: "What do you want to see me about?" Her eyes were serious, and she made no effort to smile.

"How do you know me?" he countered. "How did you know I was here? I didn't see you when I came in."

She waved a hand. "Mirrors. It's the boss' idea. And Korony pointed you out on the street the other day, and told me your name. There's no mystery about that. I have a good memory for faces. He said you're tough."

Cannon said casually: "So was Red For-

ester." Her eyes were afraid and hated him. He added: "Did you know Red?"

"No. But Korony told me you had killed a man by that name."

Cannon's grin was wry. "I didn't, but it doesn't matter. It's more important to me to learn just who you people think I am."

She said flatly: "I don't know anything. The Fly just spoke about you, that's all. He said you were smart and tough. He was going to make some money through you. He told me to watch out if you ever showed up."

"I just want to know what it's all about, that's all."

"I wouldn't tell you if I knew," she said. Her dress was silver lame and fitted an excellent figure. "The Fly told me nothing."

"What's the Fly to you?"

"Everything," she said. Cannon looked puzzled and she went on: "I know what you're thinking, but it's not like that. He's taken care of me all my life. It's a long story. You'd cry in your beer."

"He loves you," Cannon said. "Have you ever seen his room?"

"No." Then a dawning fear crept into her wide green eyes. "Have you seen him?"

Cannon nodded. "He's not so tough."

"You—you didn't do anything to him?" It was odd, the way the color drained so swiftly from her young face. "You didn't—?"

"Somebody beat me to it. He's dead."

SHE didn't stir or move in the chair. She pressed her lips together and didn't breathe. Her eyes just stared.

He said gently: "Believe me, I didn't do it. Believe me."

Her shoulders moved ever so slightly, quivering. She took a long breath this time, as if her body was just recovering from a terrible blow.

He could just make out her whisper.

"Is it the truth?"

"I'm sorry, yes." His brown face was gentle. "I went to him to find out what this is all about—all this death and hate and threat. I got there too late."

She said: "It's funny."

He pushed his drink to her. "You need it, kid. You're all right."

She asked: "Don't you know who did it?" "No. Honestly."

"I think Jerry Hurley could help you."

He waited again. He found himself liking her very much. She kept staring at him with dry eyes.

"I'll tell you quick," she said huskily, "and then you'd better go. The Fly was very friendly with Hurley, but Jerry is no good. You know, a small-time gyp artist. No good," she said, helpless to find words. "The Fly said he was going to get a lot of money from Hurley because of you. So I think you had better go there."

"Go where? Where can I find this Hurley?"

She said: "Try the Worth. He'll be there. Now go, please."

She hadn't touched the drink. Her body looked very taut.

"I'll be back," he said. He stood up and touched her hand. "Some day I'll come back, because I'd like to hear you sing."

She understood him.

"All right," she said. "Please hurry."

He left her there.

HE HAD a cup of coffee at an owl café opposite the Worth Hotel, sitting and thinking about Starlight Deegan. He thought about her quite a lot, and he understood the meaning of the Fly's room a little better now. After another cup of coffee he crossed the street to the Worth. It was two o'clock in the morning.

The lobby was small and shabby, the clerk a stooped old man with drowsy eyes. Cannon asked for a room, studying the mail slots. While he waited for his key he learned that Jeremiah Hurley occupied Rooms 522 and 523. He went up alone to his own room on the sixth floor.

When the outer corridor was silent he lit a cigarette and considered his next move. The window opened on a rusty fire-escape. He stepped outside, gun in hand, and drifted silently down to the fifth floor. Room 522 was almost directly below, according to the floor plan. He flipped his cigarette and watched the red dot hit the alley far below, then he stepped silently through the bedroom window belonging to Jeremiah Hurley.

The curtains slithered as he brushed them aside. He flattened against the wall. The room was dark and cool. After a while he made out the dresser, a little open desk, a chair, and a double bed. Through the silence came a man's deep, regular breathing. The man was just a shadow sprawled on the counterpane. He was fully dressed except for his shoes.

Cannon drifted to his side. A revolver butt jutted from under the pillow, and Cannon eased the gun slowly from under the man's head, got a grip on it, then stepped back, found the lamp switch, and snapped it on.

The light was like an explosion in the still, dark room.

The sleeping man sat up with a jerk, his hand darting for the pillow. His fingers groped, he twisted around, he winced at the light. Then he froze at sight of Cannon's tall, silent figure. His eyes fixed on the gun in Cannon's hand. He blinked round, china blue eyes and licked his lips.

"This damned flea trap," he said hoarsely, "is full of small-time heisters. Didn't you ever hear of professional courtesy?"

Cannon said: "This isn't a stick-up, Hurley."

"Oh." The man sat up straighter and squinted. He licked his lips again. He looked very young, his face pink and smooth like a boy's, except for his dead white hair. His baby-blue eyes widened. "Oh, it's you."

"I'm glad you recognize me."

"Sure." He took a deep breath. "Is this the push-off?"

"It might be."

"I see. Could I have a drink?"

"No," Cannon said.

Hurley shrugged his clothes in shape and smoothed his thick white hair. His suit was a gray gabardine and well cut. His figure was slight. He wriggled his toes into brown cordovans and wiped his mouth with a silk handkerchief. He looked up at Cannon's tall figure from under thin brows.

"Could I ask how you happened to trace me here?"

"No." Cannon gestured with the gun. He spoke very quietly. "Tell me what it's all about. I'm tired of being pushed around and waiting for somebody to knock me off

for something I know nothing about. I think that somebody is you. I think you'll talk to me now."

The white-haired man shivered. "You scare me." He was sincere. "Well, it's true we tried to knock you over. The cornice, the gas, the shot—all that. You're a tough man to kill. Then I thought I'd wear you down with psychology and telephoned you this morning."

"Why?" Cannon demanded. "What do you want?"

"Red Forester's chamois bag." Hurley spoke as if he knew his words were wasted. "Red dropped it in your coat pocket while you were buying a newspaper at Grand Central. You know all about it. Want me to go on?"

"If you want to live," Cannon said.

"Hell." The white-haired man stared at the floor. He kept sitting on the edge of the bed. "If you're going to knock me off, get it over with."

"Keep talking," Cannon ordered. "Who killed Red?"

"You did—when he came for that chamois bag. You killed Georgie, too. She was a special friend of mine. I sort of hold that against you."

"What about the Fly? Where does he get in the picture?"

"Him, he's just a shake-down artist. He spotted me on the scaffold when I dropped the cornice, so we talked it over and made a deal. He was getting a split of the bag when we got it back from you."

"What's in the bag?" Cannon demanded.

JEREMIAH HURLEY lifted his head and stared for a long moment. "You know damn well what's in the bag. A hundred gees in diamonds. Red and I had just knocked over Wainwrights on Fifth Avenue and this copper named Pratt was chasing us through Grand Central. Red ditched the stuff in your pocket. We figured you for just another goof."

Cannon took a long breath. It was all very clear to him now.

"You think I killed Red and Georgie when they came for the jewels?"

"What else?" Hurley shrugged. "And I'm next, I suppose."

"Did you kill Fly tonight?" Cannon asked abruptly.

Hurley was startled. He stared, then began laughing very softly. "This is nuts. This is the nuttiest thing I ever got into. I give up. You go around knocking people off and then hold a quiz session. You're a very queer character, Mr. Cannon."

Then something cold and hard squeezed the nape of Cannon's neck. And a man's burly voice spoke from behind him:

"He sure is amusing, Boss. He'll be funnier without his guns." The pressure on Cannon's neck became suddenly acute. "Drop 'em, dopey."

Cannon let his gun go. He didn't have to turn around to see who it was behind him. It was Irwin. He had forgotten Hurley's other room—523. He watched Hurley scoop up his gun as it hit the floor.

"He's got another one, Irv."

Swift fingers took the .32. Hurley tied his shoe laces, then stood up from the bed. He said: "Now it's our turn to ask questions."

Cannon sat down in an ominously solid oak chair. His back was to the window. Irwin's close-cropped head turned questioningly toward the slender Hurley. Both men grinned. Hurley walked stiff-leggedly toward Cannon and suddenly slashed a fist across his face. Cannon's head snapped back. He felt warm blood trickle down his cheek.

"That was for Georgie," Hurley said. He struck again, and Cannon's head went back hard. The room dimmed. "And that one is for Red."

Irwin said thoughtfully: "He's not so tough at all, Jerry."

"There's nothing like finding out."

Afterward, Cannon remembered only a jumbled nightmare of questions, torture and pain. The first time he blacked out was when the chair suddenly collapsed and he sprawled on the floor and Hurley kicked him.

"Are you going to tell us where the bag is?"

"I don't know."

Hurley kicked him again. He felt paralyzed from the chest down, and couldn't breathe. Through the roaring in his ears he heard Irwin say:

"You better talk, chum."

Another kick, and he went out, folded swiftly in protective darkness. When he came to his clothes were soggy with blood. They had him propped against the wall, and Irwin's face swam out of the mists blurring his vision.

"What did you do with it, cutey?"

"I never had it."

"You're lying!"

"To hell with you," he gasped.

He went out faster under Irwin's fists this time. As he went down Hurley kicked him, and it felt as if a rib was broken. He fainted before he had much time to think about it. Once he remembered a knock on the door, after he smashed the table with a tremendous, splintering sound. It was the sleepy-eyed clerk—frightened now. He took one look and listened to Hurley's snarl and bobbed his head.

"Yes, sir. He's drunk. Yes, sir."

And he vanished.

IT OCCURRED to Cannon that there was a glimmer of hope here. He couldn't fight back, because one of them always held a gun on him; but he could choose his falls. When Hurley swung again he twisted and slammed into the dresser, driving it into the wall with a thump. The next time he flailed his arm against the floor lamp and knocked it through the window. A third time he hit the bed and flattened it. The room rapidly became a shambles. Somebody next door pounded angrily on the wall, and once a woman out in the hallway shrilly demanded that they cut out the racket. Apparently drunken brawls were no novelty in the Worth.

Irwin's face grew dark with rage.

"He's smart, Boss. He's kicking up a racket."

Hurley's mouth was thin. His white hair was disheveled and his gray gabardine was spattered with Cannon's blood.

"Finish him," he ordered curtly.

Cannon tried to ward off the flashing gun butt. He landed one punch squarely in Irwin's face, but his blow was feeble now. From down the hall came a pounding of feet and a man's voice giving a hoarse order. Then the gun came down in a glancing blow—

He wasn't completely out. He couldn't move, but he could hear. There were cops outside the door now. He heard Irwin curse, felt himself picked up like a sack of meal and dropped out the window on the fire-escape. Apparently they didn't want to lose him.

They reached the alley as the cops broke into the room above. Cannon wriggled suddenly and slid off Irwin's shoulder. Hurley's baby-pink face loomed out of the darkness. Cannon cursed and laughed and wrenched himself free of Irwin's grip and hurled his whole weight in a wild swing at Hurley's face. His fist smashed with satisfying force into solid flesh and bone and Hurley dissolved with a scream before his eyes.

Then the cops came. There were two of them pounding up the alley, and more poured down the fire-escape. Someone had evidently put in a riot call. A shot bellowed and a bullet whip-cracked near them. Orange flame blossomed from the gun in Irwin's hand. One of the cops stumbled and fell. There came a whole volley of shots, and Irwin spun grotesquely, his arms wide, standing on his toes like a ballet dancer. He hit the pavement next to Hurley with a dull thud.

Cannon crawled away on hands and knees. There were boxes and barrels stowed away under the lowest fire stairs. He clambered over these, not thirty feet from where the cops converged on the two figures in the alley. He was laughing and giggling softly to himself. A crate filled with excelsior stood behind the row of barrels. He fell headlong into the soft straw and passed out.

CHAPTER V

What They Wanted



IT WAS four in the morning when Cannon walked down the street to his apartment. He was very tired. A drug-store attendant had patched his face and applied a liberal strip of court plaster over his right eye. The street of tall brick houses looked peaceful in the dark hour of morning.

No one was in the apartment. The rooms felt chilly. He shrugged off his topcoat, got

an armful of kindling from the kitchen, and built a fire in the little fireplace. The dancing flames made him feel better.

There was a gun in the table between his bed and Naylor's. It was small compared to the others he had handled during the night. He filled the barrel with .28 cartridges and dropped the gun in his side pocket. Next he took the evening newspaper, turned out all the lights, and settled in a chair by the fire-light with the paper in his lap. He turned to the amusement page and studied the night-club advertisements for a long while.

And he waited.

He built up the fire twice and listened to the whirr of the electric clock, and studied the newspaper. He was surprised that the cops had left the place so neat and orderly.

At five o'clock a key tickled the front door and Naylor came in.

Cannon's fat and inquisitive room-mate rubbed his hands briskly, started through the living room, and paused in surprise at Cannon's quiet figure in the chair. His bright eyes jumped to the fireplace and the newspaper, then back to Cannon's brown face. His voice was cheerful.

"Well, I'm glad to see the cops let you out, Johnny!"

"They didn't," Cannon said quietly.

"No?"

"It's you they want."

Naylor laughed. "You're fooling."

"No, I'm not," Cannon said soberly.

The other man had started to take off his topcoat. Now he shrugged it on again, very slowly. He began to gesture with his hand, then dropped it in his coat pocket. The fireplace crackled and a spark shot from the glowing embers and hit the copper screen. It was very quiet in the apartment.

Naylor said softly: "I guess you're not kidding, at that."

"No."

"What makes you think I'm mixed up in your troubles, Johnny? I never wished you any harm. I like you. We live together. And I saved your life when you were asleep and somebody put the gas on and tried to suffocate you. How do you figure that one out? Do you think I'm the one that's been trying to kill you?"

"No," Cannon said. "Not me. But you're

the cause of the whole string of murders. You have a bad habit of snooping, Fred. And when I first moved in here with you, you snooped in my coat pocket, that very first day. And you found that chamois bag."

Naylor stood just inside the living room. He made a small purse of his mouth and never took his eyes off Cannon. He cleared his throat.

"So you found that."

"No. You still have the bag and jewels. And you killed Forester and Georgie Smith when they came after them."

"That's right."

"And the Fly, to keep him from talking to me."

"Yes."

"And you tried to kill me in the Fly's house, because I was beginning to learn too much."

"Yes."

CANNON said softly: "It was your greed and sudden decision to keep those jewels, a greed that didn't get squeamish at murder, that started you off. You've lived your whole life as a plain, ordinary man, Fred. But because you stumbled on a fortune in the palm of your hand, you went berserk in your attempts to keep it. You knew very little about Red or Jerry Hurley or the Fly. You just killed all comers. And now you're thinking of how to kill me."

Fred Naylor said, "Yes," once more. He didn't look particularly deadly. He still looked short and pudgy and shapeless except for his eyes. There was a queer cold light in them as he stared at Cannon. He cleared his throat again and said: "I think—with you—it will look like suicide. Then that will be the end of it all."

"And you will keep the jewels," Cannon said.

"I will keep the jewels, yes."

Cannon said: "It's funny, how they all thought I was the one. And because they thought so, no one gave a thought to you, except myself. I knew I didn't have what they wanted—I didn't even know what it was. So it had to be you."

Fred Naylor took his hand from his pocket. The gun in his fingers looked small

and blue and deadly. His eyes were on Cannon. His mouth jerked.

He said queerly: "I'm sorry, Johnny. I like you. But you're not strong enough to fight back. You've got to be tough to hold on. You've got to be tough to live, Johnny." He raised the gun a little, pointing between Cannon's eyes. "You're too soft, kid."

Cannon shot him through the stomach, then.

He didn't have to move at all, except his trigger finger on the little gun hidden under the newspaper in his lap. The blast tore flame through the paper, tore through the fat man's coat, tore through his middle.

Naylor stood quietly for just a moment. He began to smile a little, and his fingers lost their grip on his gun. It hit the floor, and then he followed it, first his knees, then his whole body. He held his fat little stomach tightly between his pudgy hands and lay there, very quietly, staring at the opposite wall.

Cannon stood up. He scooped up the other gun and walked slowly across the floor to the telephone.

He called the nearest hospital for an ambulance and then Police Headquarters, and got Lieutenant Kisiday.

He said: "This is Cannon, Lieutenant. You'd better send that man-hunter of yours back to my apartment. I sort of lost him."

"What are you talking about? What in hell has been happening to you tonight?"

Cannon said tiredly: "Send Pratt over. I'll give him the story."

He hung up. He still held the newspaper in his hand. The blast of the bullet had scorched and blackened the lower half, but the night-club advertisements were intact. He tore very carefully around the Club Madrigal's box. The picture of Starlight Deegan wasn't too bad. It looked good to him. He tacked it on the wall with a thumb-tack and then studied the rest of the room. There was plenty of space for more pictures.

He tossed the rest of the paper into the fireplace and went to the window, threw it open, and breathed quietly of the cool air. The sky was light over the surrounding buildings.

It was morning.

Ryan wanted to get to New York; but when he found the only way was a black market reservation, he decided to stay and find out why



He said, "Maybe you can send men to prison, but you won't be here to see it!"

By JOHN RYAN



Ticket to Death



IF ANYBODY had told me that when I went to Florida I'd get mixed up with the F.B.I. and with black market stuff, I'd have told them they were crazy.

And if I'd believed them, I'd have stayed home. If for no other reason than that the Federal boys don't need outside help from me or from anybody else.

But I got mixed up with it—I certainly did.

It started innocently enough. I'd bought a round-trip ticket to Florida with thirty-day stop-over privileges. It was entirely a vacation—I hadn't even taken a gun along. For that matter I had no license to practice in Florida and no reason to think I'd need one.

I stayed two weeks, lying around on the beach in the sun during the days and spending the evenings in the cocktail bars. And during the season Florida has plenty of the last. Then I decided I had a thick enough

coat of tan and that I was getting a little bored with it all. New York's got cocktail bars, also, and that loafing was getting me down. So I went to the railroad station and started to turn my last half of the round-trip ticket in on a reservation.

I'd heard stories but I hadn't believed them. I'd bought a ticket and I couldn't see a reason in the world why it shouldn't be honored. But they gave me a reason then and there.

No space. All trains crowded. No chance for a reservation for at least two weeks, and no promise made for then.

The ticket man was nice enough about it. In fact he was so nice I decided he was laughing up his sleeve at me and I got huffy.

I said: "Now look, mister! You people took my money for this ticket. That's right, isn't it?"

He said that was right.

"Then I'm entitled to accommodations. What am I paying for?"

"I've explained it, Mr. Ryan," he said, very patiently. "We just haven't the space. You'll have to take your turn, that's all. Now if you'd made your reservation when you first came down, we might possibly have had something saved for you. But you didn't and you'll just have to take your turn."

"I've got a business to look after. At least I had a business—if I spend any more time down here I won't have any left."

"I'm sorry. I really am. It's better for you in that you're your own boss. We have a good many people in here on vacations that are going to lose their jobs for overstay-ing their time. You're actually lucky."

I BLEW up. I said I was going to sue the railroad and he told me to go right ahead. That he heard that fifty times a day or more. I said it was a crooked way of doing business and he said that the court might agree with me but that it hadn't agreed with the people that had actually sued. I ended up by telling him I wanted a reservation just as soon as I could get one and told him where I was staying and asked him to get in touch with me as soon as he could get me a thing and he promised to do that.

And I left his window thinking he'd do no such thing and that I'd haunt him every day from then on.

I got the proposition before I got to the door.

A shabby-looking little man sidled up to me and said: "Hey, mister! I heard you talking."

"Probably everybody inside of two blocks did," I told him.

"You want to go to New York?"

"I hope to tell you."

"Can you wait three days, say?"

"I want to go right now."

"That'll cost you more, mister. Twenty bucks more. Now if you wait three days it'll only cost you thirty bucks. But on to-night's train it'll cost you fifty. I only got one for tonight left and I'm holding it for fifty."

"What is this?"

"Well, if a guy wants to get out of here in a hurry, it's only right that he pays for it."

A black market on tickets was a new one on me but I didn't like it better than any other kind of black market deal.

I said: "Get the hell away from me you little — or I'll break your — neck."

"Jeeze, mister! I was only trying to give you a hand."

I cuffed him, not hard. Just with the back of my hand. He scuttled away, holding his cheek and I looked back in time to see the ticket clerk grinning at me.

I was wise to the setup right then.

I STOPPED at my hotel desk to tell them I wouldn't be checking out that night as I said I would be. And, just making conversation, I told the clerk just why.

He gave me the regular hotel clerk stock grin and said: "Why I can fix you up on that, Mr. Ryan. Of course there's a small premium concerned. But I know when a man has to get back to attend his business, money doesn't make a great deal of difference to him."

"You can fix me up or is it the hotel that does the fixing?"

"The hotel has nothing to do with it, though we like to think it's part of the hotel service. It really is, we think. It pleases the guests, and a hotel cannot operate unless the guests are happy."

"You said we."

"Oh yes! Practically everyone in the hotel could help you, with the possible exception

of some of the maids. They—ugh—can't finance it, let us say."

I said: "Well I'll be damned."

"You tell me which train you want a reservation on and I'll do the rest. That's all."

"I'll let you know," I said, and went into the bar that opened from the lobby. And there I let it be known that I was open to a proposition and got one both from the waiter and from the bar man.

By this time I was getting ideas and wasn't happy with them. I took a cab from the hotel to a night spot at the edge of town and got offered transportation from the cabby. All I had to do was complain about how hard it was to get back to New York. At the spot I got offered the same thing from the waiter, the bar man, and the manager.

I could see the idea had possibilities I hadn't realized. None of these people, other than those in the hotel even knew me. The cabby had taken me from there and assumed I was a guest. It was a high-priced place and he imagined I was a high-priced guy, that was all. At the night spot I spent money, and that was all it took. Possibly I'd mentioned the name of my hotel—I don't remember—but they hadn't even bothered to check on me. I knew they hadn't because they didn't even know my name and couldn't.

There had to be somebody at the head of it, that was a cinch, and I wanted to find who it was. And for two reasons. There'd be money in it for me some way or another and I didn't like the idea of a black market in tickets.

I DIDN'T think it would take too much work to locate the head of the thing, either, and that's where I was wrong. A mile wrong. It wouldn't be that little people like those that had been propositioning me could finance the thing. Tickets and Pullman reservations to the average place up North would be around a hundred dollars. Each of those people would either have to have a small fortune invested in them, to take care of the customers they were hustling, or would have to get them from a central agency. And it's the rare hotel clerk, waiter, and cabby who's got a thousand dollars or better to put into a gamble like that—the

gamble of finding a customer and against the law as well.

That meant the central agency idea as the logical answer—and that meant a tie-up with the railroad ticket offices.

I hadn't tried it but I had a notion the busses would be in the deal as well. They had the same transportation problem on their hands—not enough seats for too many customers, and there'd be the same chance of racketeering from the people who had to get home in a hurry on them.

It was big business with a capital B.

Of course I didn't know at the time that I was stepping on F.B.I. toes, and I don't know whether, at that stage of the game, I'd have stepped down or not.

When a man gets sore, he gets pig-headed, and I was sore. I've never been played for a patsy yet and liked it—and that's what they figured me for.

I was past being sore—I was red-headed.

THE first cagy play I ran into was from the same ticket seller I'd talked with. I bounced into the ticket office early, figuring to catch him before the rush started, but that was a joke. He was as busy as a little bee, even at eight-thirty in the morning, and I had to wait my turn.

He didn't even remember me, or pretended not to. He didn't even blink when I gave him my name and reminded him that I'd talked with him just the day before.

He said, and wearily: "Look, mister, I'm talking with several hundred people a day, all wanting just what you want. How can I remember one of the bunch?"

I was being sweetness and light. I said: "I just came in, mister, to say that I was sorry about losing my temper yesterday. It wasn't any fault of yours that you couldn't give me reservations."

"I can't give 'em if I haven't got 'em."

"Of course not. I was wondering." Here I lowered my voice. "I was wondering if maybe there wasn't some way of working it by paying a little extra."

"Not from me there's a way of working it. I sell what they give me, mister. I didn't even bootleg during Prohibition."

"It was just an idea."

He said: "Look, pal! Just open your eyes. Just ask at your hotel. Just ask a hack driver.

Just ask at any joint where people spend any kind of dough. Don't be a chump—just open up your big blue eyes. But don't ask me. I just work here for the railroad."

I said: "Thanks for the tip," and left the window.

And, so help me, if I hadn't remembered the grin he'd given me the afternoon before, when I'd cuffed the booster that had been the first to try to peddle me a high-priced ticket, I might have believed the guy was on the square.

A private/cop soon learns how to tail a man, and that's what I decided to do. And I picked my hotel clerk as the man to tail and wasted five days tagging him back and forth

before I realized I was wasting my time doing it.

And also realized I was up against smart people.

I followed the dope to the room he had in a private house each day after work. Then I'd tag him to a cheap restaurant for his dinner. I'd follow him then to a picture show—the guy was a movie fan. He'd leave the show and stop in one certain bar for one beer on his way home.

That would be the nightly routine.



I got the gun away from him then and slugged him with it, right along the jaw.



I'd pick him up the following morning and see him stop in the same restaurant for breakfast and then go to the hotel. He had his lunch there—I took it the hotel furnished lunches because no hotel clerk could afford the price that scatter charged for them.

And that was the routine, day in, day out, for the three days I watched him.

THE third day I caught wise. I saw a messenger boy come in and hand him a manila envelope and he slipped it into his own pocket instead of putting it up in the rack for some guest. He was doing his business by telephone, that was all—he was having no contact with his money man at all.

I caught the boy just as he was getting on his bike in front of the hotel. A little kid, not over fourteen. I gave him a flash of the deputy's badge I've got, not letting him look at it long enough to see what it really was, and pocketed it in a hurry.

I said: "Around the corner, sonny, and wait for me. I don't want to talk to you here."

He said: "Golly! A G-man."

I didn't tell him different. I kept on going across the street because I was in full sight of the desk, and I went in the drug store there and through it and out the side door.

And then around the block to where the kid was standing by his bike, waiting for me. The kid was actually shaking with excitement.

He said: "Golly, mister, anybody'd look at you and think you was just another tourist."

"That's my disguise," I told him. "Now about that envelope you just delivered. What about it?"

"You mean to that dopey clerk? The one that just gimme a dime tip?"

"That's the one. Where'd you pick up the envelope to deliver?"

"A man gimme it on the street and told me where to take it."

"That the first time that's happened?"

"Golly no! Only it's always a different man that gives me the envelopes. Sometimes I get four or five to take around. The guy always tips, too, mister—it don't make no difference which one it is."

"Where d'ya take these envelopes?"

"Twice I've took one of them to that dopey clerk. The rest of them to different joints around town. The guy always gives me a list that's all written out on a typewriter."

"You got any of the envelopes left?"

"Golly, mister, I'm sorry. I always leave that dopey clerk for the last delivery because he don't ever put out more than a dime."

"Got the list yet?"

"Sure, mister."

He hunted through his pockets and finally brought out a grimy slip of paper that had five names written on it. The clerk's name it turned out was Harry Grimes, and it had the hotel's name following it. Each of the other four names had the name of some hot spot after it.

I said: "I'll keep this."

"Sure, mister."

HE GOT a four-bit piece for it and I went back to the hotel. And I got back in time to see Harry Grimes in the very act of passing an envelope to some old sister I'd noticed hanging around the desk several times. I couldn't say for sure, of course, that the envelope he gave her held a railroad ticket with a Pullman reservation to match, but I'd have given nice odds that it did.

That ended my dealings with the clerk. I couldn't see any percentage in working on him at the time, though I thought I might do just that later.

He was the kind of guy that would tell everything he knew to anybody that was bigger and a little tougher than he was and was willing to prove it.

And for that very reason I didn't think he'd know enough to help me much. Whoever he was working for would think the same as I did—and wouldn't trust the guy as far as he could kick him.

I TOOK a day to think it over and spent it in the various cocktail bars that had been mentioned in the list I'd taken from the messenger boy. And I didn't see a thing wrong and I didn't get a proposition.

I didn't drop a hint that I was having trouble getting a reservation out of town, which may have had something to do with that, though.

Whether it was the drinks that I'd taken or what I'll never know. Or maybe it was because the answer was staring me in the face all the time.

I went down to the Western Union office and looked around for my particular messenger kid. I had to wait awhile for him—those kids are busier than little bees these days—but he came in and I got him to the side.

"Any more of those delivery things, sonny?" I asked him.

"Twice today, mister. I was sort of looking for you."

"Any yesterday?"

"Sure, mister. Just once though."

"The day before?"

"I get 'em every day. I get a buck, too, from the guy that gives me the envelopes to deliver. And mostly I get a quarter from the people I take 'em to."

"Any more for the hotel clerk?"

"One today. That's all. That's the first time since the time you saw me give him that one."

"How about the other kids? They get them to deliver, too?"

"Sure. We make more money out of them envelopes than we do out of anything else except maybe some guy that's awful drunk. Once in a while a drunk kicks loose with a five-spot."

I said: "I'm going to sort of keep an eye on you, sonny. But you'll have to play it smart. You'll have to act like you don't know I'm watching you. Think you can do that?"

"Sure. Golly! Anytime I get to help a G-man I'll do most anything. You know, mister, you're the first one I ever seen."

"Okay then. And there'll be ten bucks in it for you if I can pick up the guy that hands you the next batch of envelopes."

"Golly!"

"So don't stick 'em in your pocket so quick I won't get a chance to see them passed. And another thing. I'll probably be in a car. So you don't do any fancy bike riding. Keep to your side of the street and obey traffic rules."

"Look, mister. The guy, or whichever guy it is, always calls in and tells them to send a boy to wherever he wants to meet us. I could tell you right where it'd be. How'd that be, better?"

I said: "Sonny, you've earned five bucks for yourself already."

And anytime I lay out five bucks when I can't put it on an expense account, I'm getting my money's worth for sure.

I HIRED a U-Drive-It coupe early the next morning and parked it by the Western Union office. And I went in and

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talked turkey to the manager, who was as impressed by my deputy sheriff's badge as the kid had been. A badge like that is something no private cop should be without—though a man can get in a lot of trouble with one if he shows it to the wrong people.

The call came just before noon and the kid came out and said: "It's to be at the corner of Ponce De Leon and Hibiscus. That's two blocks up and four over. Can you find it?"

I said: "Sure. Give me time to get there, that's all."

He grinned and said: "I don't hurry much any place, mister. Golly! Are you going to pinch the guy, right there?"

"I am not."

He looked so sorry about it that I explained. "I'm going to follow him and try and catch his gang. Get the idea?"

"Oh, sure! Golly! You just watch."

I drove to the corner he'd told me and parked a hundred feet past it. I was taking a chance on being hung up—the guy might have a car and drive it off the other way—but I couldn't stand right by that corner and expect any action. As it was, the kid rode his bike to the corner and then had to wait for at least five minutes—and he was more nervous than I was, if the way he fidgeted around was any sign.

Then a big blond man came up from Hibiscus and to the kid. A young fellow, probably twenty-eight or around that, and looking like a professional football player on vacation. He talked with the kid a minute and then handed him a half dozen envelopes and what I could see even at that distance was a list to go with them. And the kid gave me plenty of time to see what he was given and to spot my man. Then the kid got on his bike and started away and I put my foot on the starter and got the motor going.

And then a little thin man opened the door on the side away from me and showed me the gun he held.

He said: "Okay, snoop! You asked for this."

I LOOKED at the little man and at the gun and then up the street to where the blond man had been standing. He was already halfway to where I was parked, com-

ing right to the car. He was grinning but it was a mean grin—he wasn't smiling at any joke.

The little man said: "You heeled?"

It was the first time I'd thought of that. I somehow hadn't connected selling tickets for a premium with gun play.

I said: "Lord, no! Why should I be?"

"Federal?"

"Again no."

"Just what?"

"Private cop. That's all."

The blond man was with us then. He opened the door on my side of the car so that I was between them. He said coldly: "I'll ask him the questions, Tony."

Tony said: "Why, sure, Duke. He tells me he ain't heeled but maybe it'd be better if I made sure."

"Maybe it would," said Duke.

I could see I wasn't going to like this Duke one bit. He had a smooth soft voice, rather deep, and it should have been a pleasant voice. Instead of that, though, it grated on me like a wet finger on glass. Tony reached in and patted me under the arms and Duke did the same for my hip pockets.

Duke said then: "Mister Man, you're an awful chump. Didn't you think I'd be watching that Western Union place to make sure the kid wasn't spilling his guts to some cheap copper like you? That's why I had him meet me some place close like that. So I could tag along behind him and make sure he wasn't leading somebody to me. You don't use your head or you wouldn't have walked in on it like that. Move over."

I said: "Hunh!"

He had thirty pounds or more on me and he was one of the strongest guys I'd ever seen. He just shoved me out from under that wheel like I was a kid.

"I'll drive," he said. "Get in, Tony. Keep that gun in his ribs. If he squawks, why, turn it loose."

I said: "You got me wrong, fella. I'm a private cop, that's all. I ran onto this game and wanted a piece of it. Anything as big as this can always make a place for one more."

He started the motor and put the car in gear before he spoke. He said: "Personally, I think you're Federal. But that's something I'll soon know."

Tony said helpfully: "I asked 'him that, Duke. He says no. He's a private eye. It could be he's telling the truth—I never seen a snoop yet that wouldn't sell his own mother out for a cup of coffee."

"Shut up," said Duke.

"I was just saying."

"Shut up."

THAT was the last word Tony said until Duke stopped the car, not more than ten minutes later. And he stopped the car in front of a place that, knowing rents during the season, I knew was costing somebody fifteen hundred or up, a month.

And then he only said: "Last stop on the line!"

I got out without being told but Duke had his fingers around my elbow with a finger in the armpit, and the finger was pressing in solidly. If you know the place to press, it hurts like the very devil and half paralyzes your arm—and he knew the place to press.

He said: "This is it, Mister Man. Just walk in like a little man."

I said: "Sure. Why not?"

"I'll give you something to think about, you copper—" he said, not raising his voice and not even changing the tone of it. "You'll walk in but you won't walk out."

I walked—but I began to think that I was really walking into a bad bad spot.

THE house was a honey but I was in no mood to enjoy it. I had a gun pressing in my right kidney and I had that big hulk of a Duke practically tearing my arm off at the elbow joint. They walked me into the place, with me going along like Mary's little lamb and through the first door to the right, off the big hall the front door opened on.

The door led into a room big enough to have two fireplaces and carry the effect, but it was dressed up like a business office and was being run like one. Filing cases around the walls—four adding machines and a couple of bookkeeping machines as well as six typewriters and six girls running them. At the far wall were a row of desks with half a dozen men back of them and all working. One kid, not over fourteen, was running one of the adding machines, and there was a sour-looking bird that looked like a

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chief clerk in a bank running one of the bookkeeping machines.

It looked like a very busy outside office in a very busy manufacturing plant.

Duke said to the one that looked like a chief clerk: "Sammy in?"

The clerk said: "You dumb—! Where would he be?"

Duke pinched my arm a little harder and we moved through the room and through a side door.

And there was Sammy.

Sammy was short and very fat and he looked like a cheap race track tout. And he was dressed like one—or over-dressed like one. But after you took one look at his eyes, you got over that cheap tout thought and fast. They were as cold as ice and had as much expression in them as two glass marbles.

He was sitting in a wide leather chair with what looked to be a Collins on the table by his side, but he wasn't alone. Across from him, but in a slightly smaller chair sat another man just as short as Sammy, but not fat. As big around but every inch of it muscle.

This last one winked at me and said: "Hiya, pal."

Sammy asked Duke: "This the guy?" and Duke started to show how smart he was.

He began: "I watched the kid go out of Western Union and he stopped and told this lug his story. The lug starts the car and the kid stalls with his bicycle and finally gets going and I follow. Then when I get to where I'm to meet him I see the lug staking the spot. So I see I'm right and I give Tony the office and that's all there is."

Sammy said: "Don't run off at the mouth, Duke. It don't get you no place at all. The guy'll tell me—you don't have to."

"I just. . . ."

"Get the hell out," Sammy told him. "You too, Tony."

THE short man across from Sammy took a Luger from the cushion of his chair, where it had been resting alongside his leg and hefted it as though he liked the weight.

He said: "Yeah, Duke! I'll take care of Sonny Boy! Even if I got to hold him on my knee—and paddle him."

Duke and Tony went out, with Duke giv-

ing the Luger man a look that said he didn't like him one damned bit.

And Sammy said to me: "All right, fella. What d'ya know? You Federal or what?"

"I'm a private eye, that's all. I got jerry to what was going on and thought I could maybe ride along with you boys and pick up a buck or two or three. That's all."

"Got anything to prove it?"

"Sure."

"Show me."

I handed him my wallet and what it held. My private license, permit to carry a gun, a courtesy card from the New York Commissioner—something that's damned hard to get—my draft registration and classification card, and some more stuff like that. Such as driver's license, insurance identification, and a few of my own cards as well as a few that had been given me. I even had both Western Union and Standard Oil courtesy cards in the thing.

He said: "I guess he's who he says he is, Truck," to the Luger man. And with no change in his voice:

"And he's probably F.B.I. besides."

I said: "Nuts. Your boys will tell you I wasn't even ironed. I was down here on a vacation and didn't even bring a gun along. If I was F.B.I. I'd be loaded, wouldn't I?"

"Not if you was making a play to get in my place, you wouldn't," Sam said thoughtfully. "You'd have played it just like you did. Let yourself be gathered in, thinking you'd be let out. What you think, Truck?"

I was between the two almost, within five feet of both but slightly in front of them. Just where I'd stopped when I'd handed Sammy my wallet. And I had a feeling that what Truck would say would decide the thing.

And Truck said: "I hate to do this, pal, but I been asked and a man that's asked has got to answer. Sammy, this guy is a stooge. If he ain't Federal, he's stooging for 'em some way."

I went for his gun right then. I didn't have to stop and think—I'd already planned it. I went into him head first, aiming my head at his big belly like a billy goat at a tree, and I got his gun hand with both hands just as I hit him.

If he'd been expecting it, I never could have done it. He'd have tightened up his

belly muscles and my head would have done him no harm, and he'd have grabbed that Luger back against him and plugged me as I landed.

But I caught him cold. I got the gun with just one twist, but he'd fired twice with it by that time. It was at my side and away from me though and the slugs from it missed me a foot and more. I got the gun and then I slugged him with it, smacking him on the side of the jaw and leaning on it. I could hear it break and feel it break beneath the gun barrel.

Then I got away from him and swung toward Sammy, expecting him to be getting into action, but he was just sitting there. He had both hands on his fat belly and the most astonished look on his face that I ever saw on a man. He was wearing a very light gray suit—that is, gray with green plaid checks for a pattern, and under it he had an almost white silk shirt. Oyster white I think it's called. He had his hands across the front of this shirt and even as I looked at him, I could see the shirt redden under his hands.

I said: "The boy friend clipped you, eh?"

Then the side door opened and Duke and Tony came steaming in.


I'd shot a Luger but not for a good many years. I never liked the gun. I've heard good things about its balance but I could never see it. And I liked them less right then.

DUKE saw I was in control, rather than it being the other way and shot at me when he wasn't more than ten feet inside the room. He missed, but he didn't miss Sammy. I heard the bullet chunk into him, and even in that second I remember thinking that Sammy was getting all the worst of it from his own side.

I shot back at Duke, but I missed in turn. The Luger seemed to go soft in my hand some way—it just didn't shoot like a gun.

Sam tried again and burned me alongside the leg. That time I got him, but it was an accident. I'd aimed at his belly and that damned gun shot high and caught him in the throat.

Tony had a gun out in sight but he hadn't used it. He turned and started for the door and I had to shoot twice at him before I hit him. Of course I was shooting for his



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legs, trying to cripple him, so that can be explained.

My leg was burning but it didn't even make me limp. I got to that side door and turned the Luger back and forth and tried to sound a lot braver than I felt.

I said: "You people just hold tight. You over by that phone. Get on it and ask for the cops. Jump now, damn it."

He jumped.

And then so did I. Because the door into the hall slammed open and about a dozen men came pouring in, with the guy that sold tickets at the railroad office in the lead. He was carrying a gun and ready to use it and I figured it was curtains for Mrs. Ryan's little boy. I swung the gun toward him though, thinking it was better to go out trying, and then he spoke.

He said: "Drop that, you fool! This is a Government pinch."

THE F.B.I. ticket seller's name was Ramsey, and he was so damned sore at me he wouldn't even talk to me for half an hour. He just went ahead and cleaned up the place—and I sat in Sammy's office and worked on a bottle of Scotch I just stumbled onto.

Finally Ramsey got things under way and came over and sat down by me.

He said: "Well, Mr. Ryan! You certainly raised hell and tied it up with a nice strong cord. You blew this up for me—I get half a dozen men and five times that get away. D'ya realize this racket is running all over the state? D'ya realize that man, Sammy Helziner was making as much money as the mint does out of it? D'ya realize I'd have picked up everybody and cleaned the thing up right if you hadn't butted in? I ought to charge you with interfering with an officer in pursuit of his duty."

I said: "How the hell did I know you were working on it? Nobody told me. If I was in your way, why didn't you warn me off? To hell with you. The guy's dead. Two of his own men shot him. Without him this racket will fold up and you know it. Let the papers have it that the G-men killed off the head of the gang, and the cheap pushers, the guys and gals that have been peddling the tickets, will run like rabbits. It died with him and you know it."

"Well, maybe."

"Why didn't you stop me if I was in your way?"

"I had a tag on you, Ryan. I got the dope on you from the city. I decided then that you weren't trying to cut yourself in on it. I thought you might blunder into something, that was all."

"I sure as hell did, too."

He laughed then. He said: "I've had a man right behind you ever since you first came in the office and slapped that pusher's face. He even tagged you out here—that's how I knew where to come. I was planted outside, when you started the shooting."

"It was the one named Truck that started that."

"Why argue?"

"No argument. Look, Ramsey! Will you answer me just one question?"

"Maybe."

"Now look! I know you've been trying to break this mess up—that you knew there was this black market in tickets going on. Sure, I know that. I know you took that ticket agent job so you could sort of keep an eye on things. That through that you could catch the railroad people who were working the tickets out to be sold that way. That right?"

"Why, yes, of course. I'll have half a dozen railroad men in Federal prison in three months, and it would surprise you if you knew how high up some of them are."

"It would surprise me if they were small fry. This was a big deal and took big men in the railroad business to swing their end of it. Okay! So far, so good. I know you had a hell of a lot of the pushers spotted. Guys like my hotel clerk and the cabbies and people like that that did the actual selling."

"A lot of them, yes."

"Now here's the question? Did you know who was back of it? Did you know about Sammy Helziner, if that was his name, being the guy behind it? Did you know he was running the thing and did you know this house was his headquarters? That's the question."

He said: "You win the sixty-four dollars Ryan. I didn't know. I was trying to find out and had been for the last month. That was all I was waiting for, just to find out

who the head man was and where he was located. Satisfied?"

"You bet."

"Now, I'll ask one. What were you in it for?"

I thought of telling him I was in it because I hated black markets but I decided that would sound too foolish.

I said: "For what I could get out of it, of course. With that much money around, I thought I could catch a little piece of it for my very own self."

"And have you?"

I said: "Nuts! I'll even have to pay the doctor to patch up my damned leg where it's creased. I'm out my expenses even. I didn't even break even on the mess."

He laughed and I didn't blame him.

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STRIPES FOR THE SLEUTH

(Continued from Page 49)

"Of course," he says, "peddling papers is not the other Joe's main business in life. That is a mere dodge to deceive the cops from realizing the guy is a clever actor and front man inna racket. Prob'ly they work this same gag on lots a museums, the Joe posing as a explorer or Army officer while he sells the genuine article back to its owners. Only I suppose this thirty-grand-dragon job is far and away the biggest take they ever make, and the Joe ain't willing to call quits on account his partner has chilblain feet. He figures he can knock off Bork and have the whole thirty thousand bucks to himself.

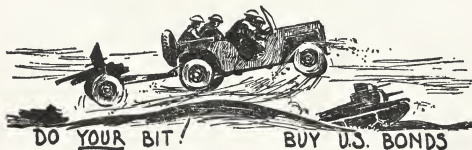
"So," Zimm says, "he does. But a hunnerd bars a soap or so in a hotel room is gonaa look funny to the Law, so he also figures he better throw the soap to the fish."

He frowns. "There is just one angle—and

that is how the body is found so quick."

"Why," says the blonde, "I called the police, naturally. But for the sake of Uncle Horace's job, I thought it best not to mention my name. However," she sighs, "the police traced the call and found my fingerprints on the pay phone I used—and I guess if it wasn't for you, corporal, one or the other of us would be hanged for the crime."

She runs over and throws her arms around him, and right there he gets his stripes—two red, lipstick ones on his kisser. But that ain't the half. It seems the Joe posing as a Army officer puts the case onna military records somehow. So Zimm don't get to be a sergeant at all. They take and send him to a Officer Training School to be educated for G-2—the guy's a captain now. And they make *me* a sergeant.



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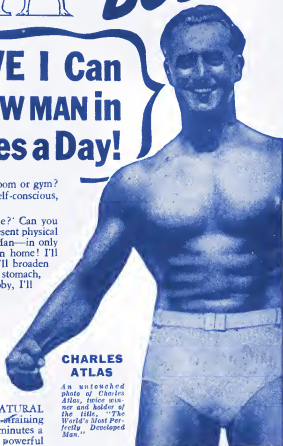
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